

PRAYER



GIRARDEY



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PRAYER

ITS NECESSITY

ITS POWER

ITS CONDITIONS

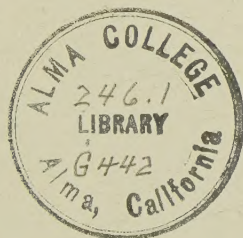
BY

REV. FERREOL GIRARDEY, C.S.S.R.

WITH PREFACE OF

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According to the faculties granted to me by Most Rev. Patrick Murray, Superior General and Rector Major of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, I hereby permit the publication of the Work entitled: "Prayer, its Necessity, its Power, its Conditions," by Rev. Ferreol Girardey, C. ss. R.

THOS. P. BROWN, C. SS. R.,
Sup. Prov.

St. Louis, Easter Sunday, April 23, 1916.

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To the Most Blessed Virgin Mary,

“The Mother of my Lord,” under the title of

OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP,

in the Golden Jubilee Year of the Recovery

and Restoration of her Miraculous Image to

public veneration in the Redemptorist Church

of St. Alphonsus in the City of Rome,

from which time the devotion to her under the aforesaid glorious title of

PERPETUAL HELP

has spread over the whole world and been rewarded by countless heavenly favors, such as remarkable conversions, cures of persons afflicted with incurable diseases, relief in both spiritual and temporal wants,

this little book on the all-important subject of

“PRAYER, ITS NECESSITY, ITS POWER, ITS CONDITIONS”

is humbly and lovingly inscribed and dedicated

by the Author,

as a testimony of gratitude

for her truly maternal favors and protection

during his long career,

with the earnest prayer

that she may ever be to him and his readers

the Mother of Perpetual Help.

PREFACE

It needs no very great powers of observation to see that we are living in times of profound spiritual unrest, of abnormal nervous tension, of unsatisfied desires and of feverish activities. Judged in the light of God's revelation, this lavish expenditure of human energy is, for the most part, sadly misplaced and, we may add, criminally wasted. For, to our times certainly apply the words of the Apostle St. John, by which he characterizes the times in which he himself was living: "All that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life." I St. John 2. 16.

To-day, perhaps more than ever, this triple spirit of Sensuality, of Avarice and of Pride is gaining control over the hearts of men, urging them on to a life of unbridled indulgence in the pleasures of sense, to a mad pursuit of money and wealth, and to a grossly exaggerated idea of self-importance that, while eager to lord it over others, brooks no subordination to authority. A further result of this utterly unchristian and downright pagan spirit, as exemplified in the lives of its votaries, is a growing spirit of religious indifference, a dense ignorance in

matters spiritual, a forgetfulness of God and a disregard of man's eternal interests, that are simply appalling, and, in some quarters, a positive aversion for, and a brazen denial of everything revealed and supernatural. In a word, men seem to be so immersed in the things of earth, that they no longer feel the need of seeking, as the Apostle bids us do, "the things that are above." Col. 3. 1.

Such being the case, need we wonder that the Apostle St. Paul, Rom. 12. 2., warns the Christians of Rome "not to conform themselves to the spirit of this world"? Need we wonder that the Apostle St. John 1. 5-19, tells us that "the whole world is seated in wickedness?" And, again, need we wonder that men who permit themselves to become so immersed in things temporal and material as to forget God and the things eternal, need we wonder that, sooner or later, they become restless and supremely unhappy, and that at last, disillusioned as was Solomon of old, they are forced to cry out: "Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity and vexation of spirit"? Eccles. 1. 2-16. For, how could the result be otherwise? God who created us and who gave us an immortal, imperishable soul, fashioned in His own divine image and likeness, God could not have created us to be satisfied with the perishable and transitory things of this fleeting world; He must have created us for something higher, for something nobler and more enduring. As St. Augustine beautifully expresses it: "For Thyself,

O Lord, hast Thou created us, and, therefore, our hearts will be restless until they rest in Thee." And long before St. Augustine, the Holy Ghost by the mouth of the Prophet declared: "I have created man, I have formed and made him, for My glory." Isai. 43. 7. And the Son of God, made man to become our Saviour and our Model, He too, both by His word and by His example, taught us what is our true destiny. He led a life of detachment from the honors, riches and pleasures of this world, a life of poverty, suffering and humiliation, but a life entirely devoted to the interests and glory of His heavenly Father. And to those who would follow in His footsteps He says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit!" "Blessed are the clean of heart!" "Deny thyself and take up thy daily cross!" "Learn of Me because I am meek and humble of heart, and thou shalt find rest for thy soul!"—And all this He tells us, we should do from a motive of love for Himself and in order to please Him. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul." Luke 10. 27. "The Lord thy God, thou shalt adore and Him alone shalt thou serve." Luke 4. 8. "This do," He adds, "and thou shalt live." Luke 10. 28. This do, "and thou shalt enter into the joy of thy Lord." Math. 25. 21.

This precise and comprehensive teaching of our Divine Lord, namely, that we are here, not for the enjoyment of the perishable goods of this world, but

for the one and only purpose of knowing, loving and serving God, and by so doing to merit the everlasting vision and possession of God, this sublime teaching has been re-echoed, with unmistakable clearness and with constant insistency, throughout the ages, by Christ's infallible Church. Millions of her children, heeding her teaching and acting as true followers of Christ, have learned and are learning by experience, that only in a life lived according to God's Holy Will, and, for love of Him, kept free from inordinate creature-attachments, can be found that true peace and happiness which "the world cannot give," but which "surpasses all understanding." Phil. 2. 7,—that happiness which consists in the possession of God's grace and friendship here below, and in the everlasting Vision and possession of God in the world to come.

To attain to the Vision and possession of the Eternal God is to attain to the final end of our creation, and this is what is meant by SAVING OUR IMMORTAL SOUL. To do what God requires us to do here below, in order that we may merit the everlasting vision and possession of Himself, this is what we mean by working out, or laboring for our soul's salvation.

Now, by faith in God's revelation and in the teachings of God's infallible Church, we know with absolute certainty that, in order to be saved, we must love God, at least in such a degree, that for love of Him we keep his Commandments, at least, in all

serious matters, that, for love of Him, we refrain from committing mortal sin, which consists in the serious and wilful transgression of His Commandments, that for love of Him, we overcome all temptations and resist all inclinations to commit mortal sin, or, if we have fallen into mortal sin, that, for love of Him, we repent with true, supernatural contrition, and, finally, that, for love of Him, we persevere in His grace and friendship until death.

But, again, it is a truth revealed by God and taught by His Church, that of ourselves, and without the aid of a special grace of God, we can do none of the things demanded of us for the salvation of our soul. Without the aid of a special grace of God, we cannot keep His Commandments, nor can we overcome the strong temptations to break the commandments, nor can we preserve the grace already received, nor continue in it for a long time, without falling into mortal sin. To be convinced of this, we need only reflect on the words of our Divine Lord when He said: "Without Me you can do nothing,"—John 15. 5. And on the words of the Apostle: "All our sufficiency is from God."—II Cor. 3. 5. And on the words of the prophets: "Thou art thy destruction, O Jerusalem; but thy help is only in Me."—Osee 13. 9. "I will put My spirit in the midst of you, and I will cause you to walk in My commandments."—Ezech. 36. 27.

But this is not all. What for us is of the greatest

practical importance, is the further teaching of God's holy Church, that, at least ordinarily speaking, God grants the special helps of His grace only to those who ask for them,—in other words, that in the ordinary course of God's Providence, prayer, that is to say, the PRAYER of PETITION, is the key to the treasury of God's special graces,—that it is the condition laid down by God for the granting of all the special graces necessary to enable us to keep the divine commandments, to conquer temptations, to avoid falling into grievous sin, to repent as we ought, after having fallen, to practise virtue, and, above all, to persevere in God's grace to the end of our life. This teaching of God's Church that must be held as of Faith, is based on the words of our Divine Lord: "We ought always to pray."—Luke 18. 1. It is based especially on His words in which He gives us the reason for constantly praying: "Ask and you shall receive."—John 16. 24. "Ask and it shall be given unto you; for every one that asketh, receiveth."—Luke, 11. 19.—words in which He declares that He will give His special lights and strengthening graces to no one who does not pray. This same reason for praying without ceasing is proclaimed by the prophets of old: "Cry to Me and I will hear thee."—Jerem. 33. 3. "Call on Me in the day of tribulation, and I will deliver thee."—Ps. 49. 14. And, perhaps, most forcefully of all, that reason is proclaimed by the Apostle St. James when, writing to some of the

first Christians who, it seems, had been complaining about their inability to keep all the commandments, he said: "You have not the strength you need, because you ask not; or if you ask and receive not, it is because you ask amiss."—James 4. 2.

From the above words of our Lord and of His inspired prophets and of the Apostle St. James, clearly and conclusively follows the absolute necessity of the Prayer of Petition as a means of Salvation for all those who are able to pray.

Right here, it is of the utmost importance to bear in mind that it is precisely through the Prayer of Petition that our eternal salvation is placed in our own power, having been made dependent by God on our consent, on our free acceptance of the grace of prayer gratuitously offered to us, and on the good use we make of it. For it must be well remembered that the grace to pray, like the grace to begin to believe and to begin to repent, is given us by God, without our having to ask Him for it. That God must give us the grace to pray in this manner, that is to say, without the need of any effort on our part to obtain it, is evident from the fact that God commands us to pray, and even to pray always. But if God did not give us the grace to pray without our asking for it, prayer would be impossible and, hence, God would be commanding us to do the impossible, a thing which the infinite goodness of God precludes. The grace to pray is, therefore, at all times at our disposal, so that at all times we can

actually pray, if we choose to do so, or, in other words, if we have the good will to exert ourselves to pray. All, therefore, that now remains for us to do, is to accept and to coöperate with the grace of prayer, and by its assiduous and persevering practice, to obtain from God the further and special graces which we need in order to be able to do the more difficult things necessary for salvation, such as the observance of the commandments, the avoidance of sin, victory over temptations, true repentance after our fall, and perseverance in God's grace to the end. For we have God's infallible word for it, that Prayer, humble and persevering Prayer of Petition, is the wonderful key, placed by God in our hands, that will infallibly open to us the treasury that contains all the special graces of God.

But if this is so, then it follows further and with irresistible logic that if any one is eternally lost, he will have no one to blame for it but himself, because, in the last instance, it will be owing entirely to his neglect of prayer. St. Alphonsus, doctor of the Church, thus pithily expresses this primary and fundamental truth of our holy Faith: "Pray well and your eternal salvation is assured, Neglect prayer and you will certainly be lost." "All reprobates," he continues, "have been damned in consequence of their neglect of prayer; for had they prayed, they would not be lost. All the Saints, on the other hand, have become saints by prayer; had they neglected prayer, they would not have become saints, and would not even be saved."

After what has been said, it will be easy to understand the supreme importance of the admirable treatise on Prayer to which these lines are serving as a preface. The great St. Alphonsus who may well be called the "Apostle of Prayer," because of his luminous system on Grace, in which the grace to pray figures as the well-fitting keystone in a perfect arch,—St. Alphonsus was accustomed to say that of all the sermons that are preached and of all the spiritual books that are printed, none are more valuable and useful than the sermons and books that are calculated to foster and encourage in souls the spirit and love of prayer, and to kindle in them the desire to exert themselves more and to be more assiduous in the practice of prayer.

May, then, this little work on Prayer which is now sent forth on its mission of love, disseminate in the hearts of the faithful an ardent spirit of prayer, a lively confidence in God, and a most child-like and tender reliance on Mary's power with her Divine Son! May it meet with a widespread and cordial reception! It makes its appearance just as its venerable author approaches the golden sunset of an industrious, unselfish and self-sacrificing life, a life whose years have been employed wholly for God and the salvation of immortal souls. On May the 27th. of this present year the author will have rounded out the 60th. year of his religious profession in the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, 60 years of indefatigable labor in the Holy Ministry, and unswerving fidelity to the sacred obli-

gations of the Religious Vows. We implore the pious readers of this work to include the author in their devout mementos, so that, when the Master calls, prayer may be the mystic key that will open unto him the Portals of Life Eternal.

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PRAYER, ITS NECESSITY, ITS POWER, ITS CONDITIONS

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

“God will have all men to be saved” (I Tim. 2. 4).

Eternal salvation is the end of every man. It is the only object obtainable by every man. It is the only object which he can be infallibly sure to attain, if only he is willing to make use of the necessary means. God, our Father in heaven, has destined a special place in heaven, His kingdom, for every man and will, moreover, give every man who earnestly strives to attain it all the necessary means for doing so.

But how different is the case with earthly aims. No man, however great his ability, however great and constant his exertions, can have the certainty of attaining his object. How many are disappointed in their plans for enjoying an easy and comfortable life, for amassing wealth, or acquiring learning, honors, prominence, influence, fame, for securing a life of domestic happiness, for indulging their passions! Experience tells us that many a man fails in his worldly aspirations, in his worldly aims. The hopes, the expectations of very many

are frequently shattered by circumstances beyond their control. This fact of experience is a clear proof that the end of man is not to be found on earth, nor in this life. Moreover, the possession and enjoyment of the goods of this world are insufficient to satisfy man's desire for happiness, for with their possession and enjoyment are connected anxiety, cares, feelings of emptiness, of a void in the heart which they cannot fill, and even feelings of weariness and disgust, and unattainable desires for things more substantial, less debasing, more uplifting and noble. King Solomon had enjoyed all that wealth, power and learning could procure, and he acknowledged that everything on earth is but vanity and fails to satisfy the cravings of the human heart for happiness. "I surpassed in riches all that were before me in Jerusalem . . . whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them not; and I withheld not my heart from enjoying every pleasure. . . . I saw in all things vanity and vexation of mind" (Eccles. 2. 9, 10, 11).

On the other hand, God, our Creator and most loving Father, has destined for each of us a special place in heaven, that abode of pure, inconceivable and everlasting delights, of perfect, unalloyed happiness, a happiness that will fill every desire and leave nothing more to be desired; a happiness that can never be lost or diminished; a happiness which it is in our power to attain, and which we can be sure to attain, if we only use the means God offers

us for this. Should we not, therefore, ardently desire and long for it, and willingly make every effort to gain possession of it? The object of this little book is to make known to every reader and, at the same time, to prevail upon him to make use of the means necessary to gain possession of his place in heaven.

To induce ourselves to profit by the means which God so lovingly offers us of attaining "our place in heaven," let us often turn our thoughts to "our place in heaven," especially when we recite that most beautiful and comprehensive of prayers, the Lord's Prayer. Its first words, "Our Father, who art in heaven," remind us vividly that we are destined to live in heaven with God, our Father, forever to share His happiness. Let us also turn our thoughts to "our place in heaven" near our heavenly Father, whenever we are assailed by troubles, adversity, suffering; whenever our heart feels oppressed or despondent; whenever we find it difficult to overcome temptation, to conquer our evil passions, to make some necessary painful sacrifice. On such occasions let us raise our eyes and our thoughts heavenward and say: O Heaven, O Paradise, Abode of delights ineffable! where my heavenly Father has prepared near Him a special place for me; where I shall forever behold face to face Him, who is infinite Beauty, and where I shall always love Him and be most tenderly beloved by Him. O beautiful Heaven, where I shall forever

be perfectly happy, participating in God's own happiness; where I shall be free from all sin, from all sorrow and suffering, and shall enjoy in glory beyond all conception a perpetual feast with all the heavenly host and the saints of God. When will it be granted to me clearly to see what I believe, to find what I seek, to possess forever what I love? O Heaven, dear object of my expectation! Here on earth everything becomes bitter to me, wearies and worries me; and yet when I turn my thoughts to my place in heaven, all this becomes my consolation, my hope, my joy, because I perceive that all this is necessary to enable me to deserve and secure my place in heaven. Whatever is transitory shall soon pass from me, all sufferings shall end, all pain shall cease, all anguish and bitterness shall disappear, all darkness shall be dissipated, and then I shall for all eternity occupy my place in the beautiful, bright and glorious Heaven. O short trials and crosses, strenuous efforts and hardships, pleasant thorns along the way, precious exile, salutary disappointments and bitterness of this life, how dear you are to me, for you enable me to merit and secure my place in Heaven!

My God, all that Thou willest, as Thou willest, as long as Thou willest! I accept all; I will devote myself to it all; I will bear it all; I will cheerfully do it all, in order to obtain my place in Heaven!

What is the earth to me, and all it contains, its goods, its honors, its pleasures! What are to me

the esteem, admiration and affection of worldlings! I will, I seek, I desire but one thing, which surpasses all earthly goods and combines all real and lasting goods! I desire, I long to obtain my place in Heaven, where I shall find God, my Father, where I shall behold my God face to face; where I shall possess my God, forever love Him and be loved by Him!

O Mary, my Mother, Queen of the elect, my guiding Star on the stormy sea of this transitory life, my Gate of Heaven at the end of my voyage, open to me this glorious dwelling and lead me to my Place in Heaven!

O beautiful Heaven! were we always to think on thee, we would never hesitate to bear all, to suffer all, to sacrifice all for thy possession!

We are made for heavenly bliss, and nevertheless, of ourselves we can do nothing to gain it, to merit it, to attain the place destined for us in Heaven, for our divine Saviour expressly declares: "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15. 5). And St. Paul tells us that without God's help we cannot of ourselves have even a good, meritorious thought: "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God" (II Cor. 12. 3). We cannot meritoriously invoke the holy Name of Jesus, except through the grace of the Holy Ghost, for St. Paul says also: "No man can say, the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost" (I Cor. 12. 3). Much less, therefore, can

we merit and obtain "our place in Heaven" without the assistance of divine grace. But if God Himself assists us with His all-powerful grace, we can assuredly gain, deserve and reach "our place in Heaven" and forever enjoy its ineffable bliss, according to the express saying of St. Paul: "I can do all things in Him who giveth me strength" (Phil. 4. 13). And here we should from our inmost heart thank the boundless mercy, goodness and love of our Father in heaven, who will most willingly help us, if we but pray to Him and invoke His help in our wants, in all that conduces to our gaining possession of "our place in Heaven." This proves the absolute necessity of prayer for our salvation. Unless we pray God to help us, we cannot reckon on God's indispensable grace or help in the work of our salvation; but if we pray to Him to help us to save our soul, to gain "our place in Heaven," God's necessary help will be given us and will enable us to perform all that is necessary for our salvation. Prayer thus becomes, as it were, the instrument of our salvation, the key of Heaven.

CHAPTER II. WHY WE SHOULD PRAY

Prayer is a strict obligation for every man. It is a sacred and indispensable duty which every man owes to God and to himself. Many and most weighty are the reasons for this.

I. MAN IS A CREATURE OF GOD. All men have been made by God and are, therefore, wholly dependent on Him for their very being and existence, for all that they have, for all that they are. God, being our Creator, is our Sovereign Lord and Master, and we, therefore, belong entirely to Him. He is the One infinitely perfect Being, upon whom all other beings depend. God is infinitely great and powerful, infinitely good, holy, wise and just. Our dependence on God is so entire and complete, that, without His constantly preserving hand, we could not exist even for a moment, but should of ourselves at once relapse into nothingness. As our Creator, as the Creator and Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, as the infinitely perfect Being, as our God, He possesses the inalienable right and claim to our profoundest homage, reverence, adoration and submission; as our Father, He deserves all our respect, honor, obedience, confidence and love. He is so great, so perfect, so exalted, that it is for

us the highest honor, the greatest proof of nobility to serve Him, to obey Him, to humbly acknowledge our entire and absolute dependence upon Him, and to be permitted to call Him our Father and to manifest to Him our love and confidence. Wherefore the Church does not hesitate to chant: "To serve God is to reign." To be His humble and faithful servants, to obey and love Him as our most loving Father is a far greater distinction and honor than to be the sovereign ruler and monarch of the whole world. Rulers of countries, of nations, as we learn from history, are not unfrequently abject slaves of worldly allurements, of human respect, of the desire for popularity and even of base passions. But the humble and faithful servant of God is the noble and glorious conqueror and master of himself; he rules over his passions, over mere human views and human respect, over the world and its allurements and vanities; he is, therefore, free and independent of all that is below him, and enjoys the true liberty of the children of God, which consists in being wholly subject to the authority of God, from whom alone all genuine power and authority on earth are derived, as St. Paul teaches: "There is no power but from God" (Rom. 13. 1). To own our total dependence on God and His absolute authority over us, and to declare this to Him is prayer, for it is giving to God the honor due to His Sovereign Majesty.

II. GOD IS THE FIRST AND GREATEST BENE-

FACTOR OF EVERY MAN. Without any merit or claim on our part, God has given us our body with its wonderful organs and senses, our immortal soul with its supersensible faculties, understanding, free will and memory, to distinguish us from irrational beings, to render us almost equal to the angels and make us even the image of Himself. Every moment of our life, everything we are and have is His gift. From how many dangers, sufferings and trials has He preserved us, and how many of them has He enabled us to bear or derive profit from! In fact, we could almost as easily count the grains of sand on the sea-shore as the temporal gifts and favors He has bestowed upon us. He has, moreover, destined us after this life to reign with Him in heaven as His heirs and there to share His own happiness forever. And to enable us to secure this glorious destiny, He sent His own Divine Son on earth to become man and die for us on the cross. And Jesus Christ, the Son of God shed all His blood and died on the cross to save us. And did He not, besides, found His Church, endow her with the Sacraments, with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and with every necessary means to enable us to save our souls and merit heaven? And His love for us went even so far as to make His own Mother our own spiritual Mother to care for us, to assist us with her all-powerful mediation to overcome all obstacles on our way to heaven. And how often has not the Son of God imparted to us the graces

necessary to overcome temptations, to keep the divine commandments and to lead a virtuous life? It may be truly said that every moment of our life has been marked by God's benefits to enable us to avoid, to expiate sin and escape its eternal punishment, and to secure in heaven the happiness destined to the beloved children of God. And all these countless inestimable gifts, favors and helps have been conferred on us without any merit on our part, and even notwithstanding our unworthiness, our sinfulness. Wherefore, God is the most liberal of benefactors and our most loving Father, and it is our sacred and indispensable duty to show Him our gratitude by frequently, nay, even daily, offering Him our most sincere and heartfelt thanks. To do this is prayer.

III. EVERY MAN IS A SINNER AND IS, THEREFORE, BOUND TO IMPLORE GOD'S MERCY AND FORGIVENESS. God, as we have just learned, is our greatest Benefactor and most loving Father. But how do we requite His countless benefits and most tender love? The greater His benefits and the more tender His love, the greater also is man's ingratitude, for he fears not to offend Him, to despise His commandments, His wishes, His entreaties, and daily outrage Him by neglecting or abusing the means of salvation God so bountifully bestows upon him. Every one of us is a sinner, for the beloved disciple says: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. . . .

If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar and His word is not in us " (I John 1. 8, 10). In fact, how often have we not transgressed the commandments of God in thought, in word, in deed and omission? Has there been even one day in our life, that was not marked by one or more sins, and even by some grievous sin? We all desire to go to heaven, but what have we done to deserve it? Or rather, have we not done much to lose heaven and deserve the punishment of hell? What would have become of us, had we died on such and such a day, in such and such a place, after yielding to temptation, after gratifying our passion? Are we not like the servant who owed his lord the immense sum of ten thousand talents, and had not wherewith to pay him even a small part of that sum? Have we any excuse to offer for our failure to pay our debt, or any security to give for its payment? What will become of us, if we fail to satisfy the claims, the rights of God's justice? Have we any means of escaping the just punishment of our sins? Yes, thanks to the Divine Goodness, we have. We have only to address to God a prayer for mercy and forgiveness, a prayer, that is the outcome of sincere sorrow for sin, joined to the firm resolution to sin no more, and to fulfil the condition requisite to obtain forgiveness, that is, to go to confession. Hence the necessity of prayer.

IV. NO MAN IS SELF-SUFFICIENT; GOD'S HELP IS INDISPENSABLE TO EVERY MAN. The Rev. Al-

ban Stolz, a holy priest, the author of many good, popular and practical books, relates that one day, whilst taking a much needed recreation in a country-place, he passed alongside a beautiful farm, in which an abundant crop of the finest cereals was approaching maturity. He tarried quite a while to admire the splendid sight. When in the meantime the owner of the farm came along, the priest expressed his admiration of the fine promising crop and remarked: "What a fine crop you have! You ought to thank God for blessing you with such a crop." "What!" exclaimed the farmer; "I do not see why I should thank God for it, since it is all owing to my hard work and to plenty of good fertilizers." The following year the good priest returned to the same place for a few weeks' rest; and one day he took a stroll to the same farm. But what a change was there! All the neighboring farms gave promise of exceptionally fine crops, but the farm he had so much admired the year before, was now mostly a parched, barren waste, and the thin spare ears of wheat appeared so wretched and poor as not to be worth the gathering. This time also he met the farmer and questioned him about his crop. In doleful tones the farmer bewailed his exceedingly bad luck, as he expressed it. "But," asked the priest, "did you not work hard and use plenty of good fertilizers?" "Yes," replied the farmer, "but in spite of this, I have the poorest crop I have ever seen. I do not know to what to attribute my

bad luck and the good luck of my neighbors, who have not worked half as hard as I did." "If you do not know," said the priest, "I will tell you. You may work as hard and as long as you can, you may, besides, use all the best fertilizers in the world, if you lack the blessing of God, you shall never succeed. This year you had not God's blessing, because last year you denied that you owed your splendid crop to His blessing, and claimed it as the result of your work and the use of fertilizers. Remember the words of the psalmist: 'Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it' (Ps. 126. 1). Henceforth never lose sight of the fact that you stand in need of God, of His blessing in all you do, if you wish to succeed." This little anecdote teaches us the very important lesson that without God we are helpless.

In fact, what are we? Of ourselves we are poor and as weak and as helpless as infants, and this especially in the supernatural order, in all that pertains to our salvation. Recall to mind what you have read in Chapter I, that we can do nothing for our salvation without the assistance of Jesus Christ; without the grace of the Holy Ghost we cannot have even a holy and meritorious thought, nor can we call upon God to help us, to be a Father to us. "God," says St. Paul, "hath sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father" (Gal. 4. 6). Divine grace, that is, God's help, is absolutely necessary for us in all that concerns our salva-

tion. To be saved, we are required to keep the commandments, but this we can do only with the assistance of divine grace; and to obtain it, it behooves us to pray to God for it. The Council of Trent, adopting the saying of St. Augustine, says: "God in commanding us to do what we are not able to accomplish of ourselves, admonishes us to do all we can of ourselves and to pray to Him for help to do what is beyond our power, and when we so pray, He imparts to us the grace to accomplish it." This, together with what has already been said in III, shows us the absolute necessity of the *prayer of petition*, as the prayer or supplication for God's help is usually called. Wherefore we are strictly obliged to pray for God's assistance in all that pertains to our salvation, and as we shall see further on, we should do so in our temporal needs, though under certain conditions. As we daily need the divine assistance in both spiritual and temporal wants, it behooves us to pray daily, and even many times daily to repeat: "I am needy and poor; O God, help me" (Ps. 69. 6).

CHAPTER III. NECESSITY OF THE PRAYER OF PETITION

The necessity of the prayer of petition is twofold: first, it is expressly commanded by God, and secondly, it is the ordinary and universal means of obtaining divine grace, which is indispensable to salvation. Hence no prayer, no salvation.

I. In the first place, GOD GIVES US AN EXPRESS COMMAND TO PRAY TO HIM IN OUR WANTS. St. Luke, in his Gospel, writes that "Jesus spoke a parable (to teach us that) we ought always to pray and not to faint" (Luke 18. 1). On another occasion Jesus commands us to pray, saying: "Watch ye, *praying at all times*"; and why does He give us this command? That we may escape the snares in the road of salvation and "be accounted worthy to stand (at judgment) before the Son of man" (Luke 21. 36), and thus secure our salvation. The Holy Ghost expressly commands us to pray, and to pray always, for He says in Holy Scripture: "Let nothing hinder thee from praying always" (Eccli. 18. 22), that is, we should let nothing prevent us from praying to God for His assistance in all our wants, as we learn from the commands God spoke through His prophets: "Cry to Me, and I will hear

thee" (Jer. 33. 3); "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee" (Ps. 49. 15); "Seek ye the Lord, and be strengthened" (Ps. 104. 4); that is, we should pray to God in our weakness, in time of temptation, or when we feel unable to perform what our duties or obligations require of us, and God will impart to us the strength we need. Moreover, in doubtful or intricate matters the apostle bids us to pray, saying: "If any man want wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all abundantly, . . . and it shall be given him" (James 1. 5). Our divine Saviour expressly commands us to pray that we may avoid or overcome temptation: "Pray that you enter not into temptation" (Mat. 26. 41). Therefore, God wills that in all our wants we should pray to Him, and have recourse to Him for His help. And this is a strict injunction of Jesus Christ Himself: "Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you" (Luke 11. 9).

II. Secondly, PRAYER IS AN ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY AND UNIVERSAL MEANS OF SALVATION, for every one who prays as he should, will surely be able to keep all the commandments of God, to avoid sin, to practise all the Christian virtues and persevere unto death in the grace of God and thus reach his place in Heaven. On the other hand, he who neglects prayer, will not be able to keep all the commandments of God, to overcome difficult and strong temptations, to avoid grievous sin, to obtain the

forgiveness of his sins, or to persevere in divine grace until death. This will now be made plain to the attentive and reflecting reader, for prayer is absolutely necessary for both the sinner and the just.

1. In the first place, there can be NO SALVATION FOR THE SINNER WHO WILL NOT PRAY. The sinner, in order to be saved, needs before all and above all, the grace of conversion; but, in the ordinary course of divine Providence, he will not obtain that most necessary grace, unless he earnestly prays for it. We need God's help, or grace, for everything in the order of salvation, for our divine Saviour Himself says to us all: "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15. 5); and with God's grace we can do all that is necessary to our salvation, for St. Paul expressly declares: "I can do all things in Him Who giveth me strength" (Phil. 4. 13); and Jesus Himself says: "He that asketh, receiveth" (Mat. 7. 8). The reason why we must pray to God for the graces we need, is because God will not force the means of salvation on the unwilling, but is ever ready to grant them to the willing, to those who desire and ask for them. Such persons are desirous of the graces of God, and manifest their desire by praying for them; and the stronger and more earnest their desire, the more earnest and persistent will be their prayer. Wherefore, in the ordinary course of divine Providence, the sinner who lacks the desire of conversion and does not pray for the grace of con-

version, of amending his life, will not receive that grace, but will live and die in sin. On the other hand, the sinner who sincerely and earnestly prays for the grace of conversion, will assuredly obtain the divine assistance to change his life, and, however sinful and obdurate he may have been previously, he will be able to give up sin and amend his life. In the Gospel we read of the conversion of some sinners by prayer. The publican was converted and received forgiveness through prayer, saying: "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner" (Luke 18. 10). The Samaritan woman received the grace of conversion only when she had besought Jesus to give her some of "the living water" (John 4. 15). The penitent thief, dying on the cross near Jesus, received the grace of repentance and conversion and the promise of paradise, when he prayed Jesus to "remember him when He would come into His kingdom" (Luke 23. 42). St. Paul, a rabid persecutor of the Church, received the grace of conversion when, struck down and blinded, he asked Jesus: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9. 6). In fact, the sinner who has not the courage to give up sin or its occasions, yet, if he persists in prayer for the divine assistance, he will not become hardened in sin, but sooner or later will be able to muster up the necessary courage and strength to change his life, and obtain the forgiveness of his sins and the grace to persevere in his amendment. But the sinner who does not pray, far

from amending his life, will grow obdurate in his evil ways, and die impenitent, and thus be eternally lost.

2. PRAYER IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY FOR THE JUST AND HOLY. However good and virtuous a man may be, he stands in constant need of divine grace to observe the commandments of God, to resist and overcome the temptations of the devil, the allurements of the world and the violence of his own passions, to perform the good works and duties of his state, and especially to persevere in the grace and friendship of God. But to be able to do all this, he must pray frequently and earnestly, otherwise he will not persevere, for the invariable rule is, "no prayer; no special grace, no perseverance, nor salvation." He who will not pray God for a necessary grace, does not really desire it; his lack of desire shows that he does not care for it, that he really does not want it. But, says St. Paul, "God is not mocked" (Gal. 6. 7), and, therefore, He does not impart grace to him who does not want it or care for it. Hence the good, the just who neglect to pray for the graces they need, will lack the graces necessary for their perseverance, and will become spiritually weak and helpless, especially when assailed by strong temptations and by the violence of their passions, and the result will be that, sooner or later, they will fall into some grievous sin, lose the state of grace and God's friendship and will run the risk of living and dying in sin,

as has happened to so many, once virtuous and holy, for neglecting to pray in the time of temptation. St. Alphonsus, Doctor of the Church, who has written so well and beautifully on Prayer, maintains and proves that prayer is the ordinary sufficient grace which God gives to every man to enable him to save his soul, for if a man prays to God for the means of salvation, in all his spiritual wants, God will impart to him all that he needs to save his soul.

On the other hand, if the holiest person on earth were to neglect prayer, he would soon meet the same fate that befell St. Peter for not heeding the injunction of Jesus to watch and pray. St. Peter truly loved our divine Saviour, and probably with a greater love than any of the other apostles. And nevertheless he basely denied his Divine Master three times, and not only did he deny Him, but even swore with fearful imprecations that he did not know Him. How did he happen to fall so low, so deeply? It was because he had neglected to pray. Let us see how this came to pass. After the Last Supper Jesus betook Himself with His apostles to the Mount of Olives. "Jesus saith to them: You will all be scandalized in My regard this night, for it is written: I will strike the shepherd and the sheep shall be dispersed. . . . But Peter saith to Him: Although all shall be scandalized in Thee, yet not I. And Jesus saith to him: Amen I say to thee, to-day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice. But Peter spoke

the more vehemently: Although I should die together with Thee, I will not deny Thee." Then Jesus left eight of the apostles at the entrance of the garden of olives, and took with Him Sts. Peter, James and John and "saith to them: My soul is sorrowful even unto death, stay you here and watch." Then Jesus went forward a little to pray His heavenly Father, "if it might be, . . . to remove the chalice" (of His passion and death) from Him. Then He came to the three apostles, "and findeth them sleeping. And He saith to Peter: Simon, sleepest thou? Couldst thou not watch one hour? Watch ye and pray that you enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Far from performing this injunction, St. Peter continued to sleep and did not pray. He was tired, and saw no necessity for praying, for was not his mind made up to stand faithfully by Jesus? Hence when the time of trial came, he was left to his weakness. When Judas came with the armed multitude to arrest Jesus, Peter at first showed his bravery by striking with the sword; but as Jesus soon after allowed Himself to be arrested, bound and led away, Peter took to flight, just like the other apostles; but seeing that he was not pursued, he turned to follow Jesus, but only from afar, and having reached the place of the Saviour's trial, he mingled outside in the court-yard among the servants and idlers, awaiting the issue. "When Peter was in the court below," writes the evangelist,

“there cometh one of the maid-servants of the high-priest. And when she had seen Peter warming himself, looking on him she saith: Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying: I neither know nor understand what thou sayest. And he went forth before the court (yard); and the cock crew. And again a maid-servant seeing him, began to say to the standers-by: This is one of them. But he denied again. And after a while they that stood by said again: Surely thou art one of them, for thou art also a Galilean. But he began to curse and to swear, saying: I know not this man of whom you speak” (Mark 14). Had Peter obeyed the injunction of his divine Master, he would not have so shamefully fallen and denied Him, for his prayer would have obtained for him the grace and strength to remain true and steadfast.

The greatest saint on earth stands in absolute need of prayer for his perseverance, because frequent, constant prayer is the indispensable means the just have to persevere in God's grace and friendship. The crowning grace of perseverance cannot be deserved by any amount of good works. Had we acquired as much virtue, accumulated as many merits and labored as much and as zealously as St. Paul for the glory of God and the salvation of our fellow-men, we could not thereby have deserved the priceless grace of final perseverance. This grace is so great, so precious, that no amount of good works and merits can deserve it, and God is not

obliged to give it to any one. Nevertheless, we can obtain it through constant and persistent prayer. We must pray for it *daily*, as we daily pray for our daily bread, that we may obtain it *every day*. If we thus faithfully pray for it every day, God will surely grant it to us, for as we shall see in the following Chapter, God has solemnly promised to give us all we pray for; and this includes the grace of perseverance for the day on which we pray for it. Hence we should say to God each day: "Our Father, who art in heaven, give me this day my daily perseverance," just as we pray "this day for our daily bread." We have just seen that prayer is absolutely necessary for both the sinners and the just; the sinners cannot be converted without prayer, nor can the just persevere in God's grace and friendship without prayer. Hence without prayer there can be no salvation, no place in heaven for either the sinners or the just.

3. Every man can be saved by prayer, because PRAYER IS IN THE POWER OF EVERY MAN. In fact, it is so easy to pray, that every man can pray whenever he wishes. No learning is required to pray, to speak to God, to ask for His help. And since God is our Father, and our divine Saviour has taught us to address Him as our Father, we have no reason to dread or fear Him, for since He is the most kind and loving of fathers and we are His beloved children, He is most willing and ever ready to help us and to supply our wants. Our own

experience testifies that He does so; hence in all our wants we should go to Him with the same confidence which little children have in their good, kind father, and, in the simplest and plainest language ask Him for what we need. And since God is everywhere, He is always present to us and ready to hear us, day and night, at all times and in all places, and therefore we need not fear disturbing or importuning Him. In fact, the more and the oftener we go to Him like little children, the better He will be pleased with us, and the more readily and bountifully He will supply our wants. To pray to God we are not required to be in good health, to be strong, rich, powerful, talented, learned or smart, to belong to a select or influential class, to wear fine clothes or costly jewels. To pray to God, we need not be fasting, to go a long distance, to pay a sum of money, to work hard, to give abundant alms, or to perform severe penances; for we need only to raise our mind and heart to God, conscious of our helplessness and misery, with our heart full of good desires, and simply tell Him our wants, and beseech Him to grant them to us. We can pray to God at every moment of the day and night, wherever we may be, at home, at our place of work or business, in church, in the street, in bed, sitting down, kneeling, standing, walking, riding, in company, alone, at our meals, when recreating ourselves, or playing games. God is ever ready to listen to us and to grant our prayers for His assistance, for His grace.

We can pray to God in all the conditions of life, as was done by Moses as leader of an immense multitude, by Samuel in the temple, by Esther on the throne, as Daniel in the lions' den, as the three youths in the fiery furnace, as King Ezechias in the throes of death, as St. Paul in irons in the prison, as St. Joseph in his workshop, as Sts. Germaine and Paschal tending their flocks, as St. Isidore tilling the ground, as St. Bonaventure writing books, and as St. Thomas engaged in deep study, for, says the Holy Ghost, "let nothing hinder thee from praying always" (Eccli. 18. 22); "It behooveth always to pray" (Luke 18. 1), and "pray without ceasing" (I Thess. 5. 17). How beautiful is not the example of the Prophet Daniel who as usual continued thrice daily to pray prostrate towards Jerusalem, although he knew that he thereby exposed himself to be cast in the lions' den to be devoured by them! Let us profit by the salutary remark of St. John Chrysostom concerning those who show little zeal for prayer: "We who retire to rest at night," he says, "and know not whether we shall live to rise in the morning; who rise in the morning, being uncertain whether we shall live to retire to rest when the night comes, who are uncertain of our salvation and are perhaps heavily laden with sins, nevertheless care so little about praying as to forget or neglect prayer altogether, just as if we were self-sufficient and able to get along without God!" What a blindness! What an inexcusable and fatal neg-

lect? We cannot say that we do not need any help or favor from God, nor can we allege that we do not know how to pray, how to tell God our wants, whilst in all that concerns our temporal interests we are fully capable of making known our desires, our wants, and are very eloquent in our applications for work, for an office, in making known our wants to those who are able or ready to supply or relieve them. Although God knows our helplessness and our wants far better than we do, He justly requires us to acknowledge our dependence upon Him, and to ask Him to relieve them. As to those who neglect to pray under the plea of their many occupations, or that they have too much to do, and have no time to pray, or feel too tired to pray, they would find plenty of time to pray, if they curtailed the time they devote to gossip, to reading the papers, or light literature, or making or prolonging more or less unnecessary visits, or attending plays or other amusements, or indulging in other pastimes. Let us be honest with ourselves and with God also, and acknowledge that if we sincerely wished, we could without increasing our fatigue or neglecting our obligations and temporal interests, frequently raise our mind and heart to God in order to pray for the grace to be more patient, more charitable, for the forgiveness of our sins, for the grace to forgive those who have injured us, to overcome temptation, to conquer our passions, to keep out of sinful occa-

sions, and also to say now and then an Our Father or a Hail Mary, or make a pious aspiration to Jesus or to His Blessed Mother.

CHAPTER IV. PRAYER IS ALL POWERFUL

"Amen, amen I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you. . . . Ask and you shall receive" (John 16. 23, 24).

Who but a divine Person could have made so generous a promise and been able and absolutely reliable to keep it faithfully? But this is not a mere promise, for its very wording shows that it is equivalent to an obligation taken, so to say, under oath, for such seems to be the meaning of the expression "Amen, amen" (in truth, in truth), which our divine Saviour used whenever He wished to emphasize His words. Moreover, this wonderful promise, though addressed on this occasion only to the apostles, who were then alone present, is made to all men without exception, for Jesus, on another occasion, made no restriction of persons, but said plainly: "*Every one* that asketh, receiveth, and he that seeketh, findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Mat. 7. 8). Nothing is excepted, when we ask, or pray, in the name of Jesus Christ: "Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in My name, that will I do" (John 14. 13). "You shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15. 17).

Both the Old and the New Testaments are full of examples of the efficacy, of the unlimited power of prayer. Let us examine a few instances. Josue, who led the Israelites in the conquest of the Promised Land, seeing on one occasion that the day was too short to enable the Israelites to reap the fruits of their victory, prayed to God and commanded the sun, which was about to set, to stand still; and the sun obeyed and remained above the horizon, and did not set until the victory was complete, "the Lord," says Scripture, "obeying the voice of man" (Jos. 10. 44). Some time previous to this occasion, when the Israelites, under the leadership of Moses, were on their way to the Promised Land, the Amalecites barred the way, and a battle ensued. Whilst Josue was with the army giving battle, Moses was praying on a neighboring hill for the success of the Israelites; "and when Moses lifted up his hands (to heaven), Israel overcame; but if he let them down a little (slackened in his prayer), Amalec overcame. And the hands of Moses were heavy; so they (his companions) took a stone, and he sat in it, and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands on both sides; and his hands were not weary until sunset. And Josue put Amalec and his people to flight" (Exod. 17. 10-13). We learn from King David how powerful prayer is to obtain forgiveness for the sinner. David had committed two great crimes and thereby given great scandal to the whole nation. When he had been made aware of

the extent of his guilt, he repented most sincerely and earnestly and bitterly implored the mercy of God, and obtained forgiveness. It was by prayer that the pious king Ezechias, when dangerously ill, obtained the prolongation of his life, as we read in the thirty-ninth chapter of the Prophet Isaias: "In those days Ezechias was sick even to death, and the prophet Isaias said to him: Thus saith the Lord: Take order with thy house, for thou shalt die and not live. And Ezechias turned his face towards the wall, and prayed to the Lord. Then God sent Isaias again to him to say to him: I have heard thy prayer: behold I will add to thy days (life) fifteen years." In like manner, the same King Ezechias, when Sennacherib with an army of two hundred thousand soldiers was laying siege to Jerusalem, had recourse to prayer for help and deliverance, and his prayer was granted, for God sent an angel at night into Sennacherib's camp, and the angel slew one hundred and eighty-five thousand of his soldiers. Manasses was a very wicked king of the Jews. In punishment of his evil deeds he was conquered, captured and cast into a dungeon; there he repented of his crimes, prayed to God for mercy, and was forgiven and even recovered his kingdom. God sent the prophet Jonas to threaten Nineve with destruction on account of its wickedness. But at Jonas' preaching the Ninevites did penance and prayed God for mercy, and thereby escaped destruction. Judith by her prayer obtained the opportu-

ity and the courage to save her city Bethulia from capture and destruction. It was by prayer that the three heroic young men cast into a glowing furnace at Babylon were wonderfully saved from being burned to death, that Tobias and Sara were freed from their misfortunes, that Esther obtained the safety of her people, that Daniel remained unhurt in the lions' den, and that the chaste Susanna obtained the proof of her innocence and thus saved both her reputation and her life.

In the New Testament the proofs of the boundless power of prayer are almost countless, especially in the cures Jesus Christ effected in answer to prayer. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that St. Peter was on the eve of being put to death for the faith, but was miraculously freed from prison and death by an angel, for the whole Church was praying for his deliverance. The first conversion among the pagans to the Christian religion was that of the centurion Cornelius and his household, as the angel told him; it was in answer to his prayers and alms-deeds. That St. Peter restored the holy woman Dorcas to life after her death was owing to the prayers gratefully offered for her by the poor women who had been the recipients of her charity (Acts 9. 36-41).

The psalmist asks: "O God, Thou art terrible, and who shall resist Thee?" (Ps. 75. 8). Yes, God is terrible in punishing the wicked; He is almighty; and, nevertheless, there is one thing that

can successfully resist, and even overcome His justice. It is an humble and earnest prayer. To such a prayer God's infinite justice and power will yield, and the almighty God Himself is compelled by such prayer to show mercy. One of the most beautiful examples of this power of prayer over God Himself is given us by Moses. Whilst Moses was spending on Mount Sinai forty days in fasting and prayer, communing with God and receiving from Him the tables of the Ten Commandments and the necessary directions to draw up the Old Law for the Israelites, these latter fell into idolatry, adoring the golden calf and imitating the idolatrous rites and orgies of the pagans. "God said to Moses: Go, get thee down; thy people whom thou hast brought out of the land of Egypt, hath sinned. They have quickly strayed from the way, which thou didst show them; and they made themselves a molten calf, and have adored it and sacrificed victims to it. . . . Let Me alone, that My wrath may be kindled against them, and that I may destroy them." Why does God ask Moses to let Him alone and not to prevent Him from destroying the Israelites? What could Moses do against God's will and His almighty power? Of himself he could do nothing! But Moses could pray for the Israelites and implore God to forgive them. The very words of God were a sufficient hint to Moses about the power he could wield in restraining God's justice and obtaining mercy for the idolatrous people. Moses took the hint and "be-

sought the Lord, saying: Why, O Lord, is thy indignation enkindled against Thy people? . . . Let Thy anger cease, and be appeased upon the wickedness of Thy people. . . . And the Lord was appeased from doing the evil which He had spoken against His people" (Exod. 32. 1-14). This clearly shows us the almighty power of prayer, that its power is so great as to be able to stay the divine justice irritated against the sinner, and, as it were, to compel God to show him mercy, however numerous and enormous his sins may be. Wherefore St. Augustine says: "In order to escape the punishments of God's justice, we sinners have only to pray to Him for mercy." Prayer is, as it were, more powerful than God Himself, since it is able to overcome Him. Our confidence in prayer should, therefore, know no bounds.

Our salvation, under one aspect, is entirely God's work; under another aspect, we may even assert, that it depends entirely on ourselves. In the first place, we may consider it as entirely God's work. As we have seen in Chapter I, without God's grace we cannot have even a good thought, a good desire, invoke God's help or even the name of Jesus, nor can we do anything good or keep the commandments without God's grace. Wherefore St. Paul says expressly: "It is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish" (Phil. 2. 13). Hence without God's grace we cannot have even the desire to be saved, to pray to Him to help us, or to accom-

plish our salvation by the performance of good works and the keeping of the commandments. Therefore, under this aspect, our salvation would depend wholly on God.

Secondly, God's *grace alone*, though in itself infinitely powerful, cannot save us, for we are rational and free beings, and not mere machines, and God will not save us against our will, for He has endowed us with a free will and ever respects our free will and never will deprive it of its freedom. To be saved, we must have the sincere desire, the will to be saved. If we have this and nourish this sincere desire, this will, we shall devote ourselves to the work of our salvation, and finding the work above our weak, unaided efforts, we shall pray God to help us in this most arduous work, and the more earnest and persistent our prayer, the more powerful will be His help, and His help added to our own earnest exertions will enable us to secure our place in heaven for all eternity. Therefore, our salvation is, under this aspect all in our own power. The desire of our salvation, our own efforts and labor, and God's necessary help being the result of our prayers, all these are therefore *ours*. Hence if we are not saved, but are lost, we shall have only ourselves to blame for not having done what we could do to be saved. Wherefore, God says to the lost sinner: "Destruction is thy own (work), O Israel; thy help is only in Me" (Osee 13. 9). To do our share in the work of our salvation, we need

to have the earnest desire, the firm determination to be saved, cost what it may. If we lack this earnest desire, this firm determination, let us persistently pray God for it, and He will grant it to us.

CHAPTER V. WHY SO MANY PRAYERS ARE NOT HEARD

Prayer is absolutely necessary to salvation; prayer is easy, is in every man's power, wherever, whenever, as often as he wishes; prayer is all-powerful, for God has promised to grant us what we pray for; and nevertheless, so many persons complain that their prayers are not heard, however numerous, earnest and persistent they may be! If our prayers are not heard, not granted by God, the fault is not God's, but ours. This we shall now see clearly.

1. In the first place, the prayers of some are not granted, because THESE PERSONS ARE UNWORTHY, UNFIT TO BE HEARD, on account of the hindrance they themselves place in the way, according to the prophet: "Thou hast set a cloud before thee, that thy prayer may not pass through" (Lament. 3. 44). That cloud is sin, mortal sin. The hardened, obstinate sinner who has no wish, no sincere desire to give up sin, is wholly undeserving of being heard by God, for he wilfully remains in sin, is a wilful enemy of God and has the intention, the will to continue in His enmity, in his sin. To such a sinner we may apply the saying of the man born blind, who

had received his sight from Jesus: "God heareth not sinners" (John 9. 31). But as to the sinner who grieves over his sad state, and has, at least, the desire to give up sin and change his life, though he may be deterred from doing so on account of the great sacrifices this would require, he has some claims to be heard. Such a one should, before all else, pray God to impart to him the necessary courage and strength to give up sin. As to the sinner who is fully determined to do all in his power to amend his life, and prays God for the grace and strength to do so, God will, most assuredly grant his prayer and help him to do all that is required to recover His friendship and to lead henceforth a good and virtuous life, and will forgive him all his sins, however heinous and numerous they may be. But as to the sinner who does not detest his sin and has neither the will nor the desire to amend his life, the object of his prayer will be some temporal favor or advantage, which, if granted to him, would most probably enable him only the more to offend God and gratify his own passions by committing more sins. He, therefore, does not deserve to be heard; if, however, such a sinner were to pray for some spiritual favors, he has no reason to expect them, unless he first recovers the divine friendship and obtains God's forgiveness by performing all that is required for this.

2. In the second place, SOME PERSONS are not heard when they pray, because they PRAY FOR

THINGS THAT WOULD PROVE HURTFUL TO THEM, and it is a proof of mercy and love on the part of God not to grant such prayers. When He refuses to hear such prayers, God usually imparts something else that will prove more beneficial to the petitioner. God is like a kind and loving father, who because of his love for his child, steadily refuses to give him a thing he asks for and wishes to get by all means, if such a thing would prove dangerous or hurtful to him. Hence a good and reasonable father, because he dearly loves his little child, refuses him a sharp instrument, a loaded weapon, and everything that may in any way injure him or cause harm to others. God is the most loving of fathers; hence when a certain sick man prays to get well, to be free from pain or infirmity, and God knows well that if that sick man were to get well, he would end in going astray and lose his soul. Out of mercy He does not hear his prayer, but imparts to him some other favor, or some spiritual benefit. Another, a good practical Catholic, prays for success in business, for a good position, for a political office, and God foresees that if he were to attain the object of his desires, he would soon become so absorbed in material interests, wealth, goods or in his work, or get into dangerous habits or company, as to gradually neglect the interests of his immortal soul and wholly give up the practice of his holy religion, as has happened to so many others. In fact, does not a sad experience teach,

that many a man, many a woman, would have remained good, charitable, virtuous, exemplary and faithful Catholics, had they never acquired wealth, power, influence or popularity, but, having attained the object of their desires, of their ambition, they found therein the occasions and enticements to wholly devote themselves to worldly pleasures, to the gratification of their passions, and entirely to forget their soul, their God, their eternity!

When we pray, we should ask God for what we need the most, that is, for spiritual gifts, for what concerns the salvation of our soul, for, asks our divine Saviour, "what doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul? Or what exchange will he give for his soul?" (Mat. 16. 26). Nothing should be dearer to us than our immortal soul, for if we lose it, all is forever lost for us. We should ask God to supply all the needs of our soul. To pray for these we should know them, and to find them out we should reflect much, examine what sins we usually commit, what hindrances we have to overcome to work out our salvation, instead of turning all our attention to our corporal and temporal wants. Let us not forget that Jesus Christ said: "Whatsoever you shall ask the Father *in My name*, I will give it to you." What is it we can and should ask God *in the name of our Saviour*, unless it be at least *principally that which concerns the salvation of our soul*, for which the Son of God became man and died on the cross?

Hence we may ask the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, *only for those things which directly or indirectly concern the salvation of our soul*; as for that which has no reference whatever or is in opposition or injurious to the salvation of our soul we cannot claim to be heard by God, for such things are not included in the divine promise. As to spiritual goods, as to our needs in the work of our salvation, we may be sure of receiving them, when we ask them of the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, such as true sorrow for our sins, the forgiveness of our sins, confidence in God, the love of God and of our neighbor, humility, patience and resignation in sickness and trials, strength in temptations, the grace to pray well, holy purity, meekness, fidelity to our good resolutions, and the like. All this concerns our salvation.

As to temporal matters, we have a kind of claim to be heard when we pray for the *necessaries of life*, for our divine Saviour Himself has taught us to do so in His admirable prayer, the Our Father, in which He wishes us to say to our heavenly Father: "Give us this day our daily bread," that is, necessary food, clothing and shelter. Whenever we ask for temporal blessings, such as success in our undertakings, the cure of disease, deliverance from crosses and trials, we should ask God for them *conditionally*, that is, pray for it in this manner: "O my God, grant me . . . if this is good for me, if it does not prove injurious to my salvation." Let

us, whenever we pray to God, observe the admonitions of our divine Saviour: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all the rest shall be added unto you" (Mat. 6. 33). If you act otherwise, Jesus will say to you as He did to the sons of Zebedee, who had asked to sit one at His right hand the other at His left, when He would come into His kingdom, that is, for the two highest positions, or offices: "You know not what you are asking" (Mat. 20. 22). Temporal misfortunes, corporal sufferings, physical evils, loss of goods are not real evils in themselves, for sin is the only real evil. Often all the aforesaid evils, as experience shows, are really great blessings and sometimes indispensable means of salvation, so that very frequently were God to free us from them, it would be rather a punishment than a blessing. Loss of health, of goods, sufferings, contradictions, disappointments, adversity and other so-called misfortunes cause many a sinner to be converted, to return to God, to amend his ways and lead a holy and virtuous life, who would, without them, have continued to live in sin and end in losing his soul. When fortune smiles on a man, he will naturally be more and more attached to worldly goods and may be easily estranged from God and from God's service.

Moreover, just as God has destined for every man his place in heaven, so also He has destined for each man the crosses that will bring him to heaven. "This is the will of God," says St. Paul, "your

sanctification" (I Thess. 4. 3). This is also the will of God, that you save your soul by taking up your cross and following Jesus Christ carrying His. Hence do not expect by prayer to get rid of that cross to which is attached your salvation, the acquisition of your place in heaven.

It is not wrong, however, to pray for temporal goods and favors, for even the greatest saints have prayed for such. Even the Blessed Virgin herself at the marriage feast at Cana asked Jesus Christ for a temporal favor for the newly married couple, and Jesus Himself wrought His first miracle to grant that favor. But to neglect to pray for spiritual favors, for what is necessary for salvation, for what greatly promotes it, and to pray only for temporal benefits is to pray, at most, only for trifles, for useless things, and God would serve us right by not hearing such prayers. "God," says St. Basil, "is almighty, and most liberal in His favors; we should, therefore, ask Him for *great things*, and not for mere trifles." All temporal goods, however great and precious, are but trifles, when compared with even the slightest spiritual favor, or a single degree of divine grace, for every spiritual favor is of infinite value, having cost the blood of Jesus Christ to obtain it for us. Would you not charge with being foolish or demented the man who for the mere asking could obtain a donation of one million dollars, of which he were in need, but would, instead, ask for merely one nickel? What should

we call that man who, by a short prayer, can obtain from God the full remission of all his grievous sins, and grace and strength to overcome all temptations, to subdue his passions and the glory of heaven, and yet will not pray God for any of these necessary means of salvation, but prays fervently and persistently and solely for a little temporal advantage, for goods that, far from making him happy and contented, will only cause him trouble, anxiety and bitterness, which he will soon have to give up, and which may have been for him the cause of his eternal damnation?

Therefore, when in our temporal wants or trials we have recourse to God, let us pray earnestly and fervently, indeed, but, at the same time, with a holy resignation, saying to Him as our divine Saviour did in His agony, "not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Mat. 26. 39). Let us imitate the example of a little boy related in the Life of Mgr. de Ségur, who, on account of his saintly life and wonderful zeal was surnamed "The blind apostle." In the year 1865, on the occasion of the celebration at Annecy in Savoy of the two hundredth anniversary of the canonization of the meek and gentle St. Francis de Sales, thousands of pilgrims from every direction came to venerate his relics, and many of them also implored of God favors, spiritual and temporal, through the saint's intercession. Mgr. de Ségur undertook daily to preach to the pilgrims. Among other things he said that in all our prayers for divine as-

sistance, we should always pray especially that the will of God be done in our regard. One day there was in the audience a poor woman who had brought her little son blind from his birth. After the sermon she brought her little boy near the altar on which the saint's relics were exposed, and said to him: "My child, ask of God through the intercession of St. Francis to give you your sight." "But, dear Ma," said the little boy, "did not Mgr. de Ségur just now tell us that we should have no other will than the will of God? I will not ask God for eyes, but for the will of God." The lesson taught us by that little boy is admirable and needs no further explanation.

CHAPTER VI. CONDITIONS OF PRAYER

There is a third class of persons, who complain that their prayers are not heard. To these St. James says (4. 3): "You ask and you receive not, because you ask amiss." It is not enough for us to pray, but we should pray well, otherwise our prayers are not fit to be heard by God. When we pray, we speak to God and ask favors of Him; and therefore our prayers should be such as to be pleasing to Him, who deserves our deepest homage, reverence, respect and confidence and sees our inmost heart. If our prayers and the dispositions of our heart are such as to be displeasing to Him, we need not be astonished, if they fail to obtain anything from Him. Let us see what are the conditions or qualities of prayer pleasing to God and worthy of being heard.

I. ATTENTION. To please God our prayer should, in the first place, be said with attention. How many pray and pray much and often, but say their prayers hurriedly, to get soon through with them, or to be able to say many prayers in a short time, and whilst praying they think of everything except of God and the meaning of their words. Such persons resemble the Jews of whom our

divine Saviour said: "This people honoreth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Mat. 15. 8). Let us bear in mind that it is not the number of our prayers that avail us with God, but the manner in which we say them. One Our Father said with due attention is worth more with God, than one hundred said mechanically, hurriedly, without attention. He who prays without attention does not pray as a rational being, but more like a parrot, a graphophone, or a little child in school reciting his lesson by heart. Attention is, as it were, the soul of prayer; just as the body without the soul is a worthless corpse, so also prayer without attention is meaningless and worthless. Hence the prayers said whilst wilfully allowing our imagination, our mind to run about in every direction, to dwell on everything except on God and on what we are saying to Him, are not pleasing to God, are unfit to be heard, for such prayers are wanting in due respect to God. Suppose a person, whilst speaking to you, looked around in every direction, turned his back to you, paid no attention to you, or to what he was saying to you, you would consider him very disrespectful to you. How much more must not God, who is our Creator, our Father, our greatest Benefactor, be displeased with our prayers said hurriedly, carelessly, without attention, and consequently, refuse to hear them!

2. HUMILITY. Whose prayer will God surely hear? The humble man's. Whose prayer will He

refuse to hear? The proud man's. This our Lord Himself tells us in His parable of the pharisee and the publican praying in the temple. God heard not the proud pharisee's prayer, for in the very presence of God he gloried in himself and his alleged good works, and preferred himself to every one else. But the poor publican, laden with many sins, indeed, humbled himself and implored God for mercy, and his prayer was heard. Hence St. Peter says: "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (I Pet. 5. 5). Let us remember, when we pray, that we are poor, wretched sinners craving mercy from God, poor beggars asking for an alms without any merit or claim of our own. Therefore, let us, whenever we pray, most humbly beseech God to supply our great need, to strengthen our great weakness, and this, not because of any merit or claim of our own, but through the infinite merits and mercy of our Saviour Jesus Christ. The more we humble ourselves, the more we feel convinced of our misery and helplessness and of our total dependence on the mercy and bounty of God, the more surely we shall obtain the object of our prayers.

3. SINCERITY AND EARNESTNESS. Thirdly, our prayer should be sincere, we should mean what we ask of God; we should really wish for, desire it, and should, therefore, do our share to obtain what we pray for. For instance, we pray God to forgive our sins; if we really mean this, we shall not fail to *do*, on our part, all that is necessary to obtain

their forgiveness, for he who wishes the end, must also wish the means of attaining that end. We must, therefore, be sincerely sorry for our sins, firmly resolved to amend our life and avoid all proximate occasions of grievous sins, and make a sincere confession. If we do this, our share, we may be sure of obtaining God's forgiveness; but if we fail to perform our share, our prayer for forgiveness is not sincere, for God cannot forgive the sins of those who are not truly sorry for them, or not resolved to amend, or to confess at least their mortal sins. In like manner, he who sincerely prays God to grant him the virtue of patience, will also do his share and, therefore, will watch over himself, especially on those occasions in which he is apt to yield to impatience or anger, so that as soon as he is aware that an inward feeling of impatience or anger begins to rise within him, he will endeavor to suppress it, especially by the pious aspiration: "O Jesus, give me patience! Help me to bear this for the love of Thee!" God will help only him who does his share, who alone is perfectly sincere and earnest in his prayer for patience. All this clearly indicates that we must not expect to go to heaven by merely praying to God, without doing our share, without making the necessary efforts to fulfil our whole duty. We must, on our part, do all in our power to keep the commandments, and if we do this manfully, we can be sure that God will do His share and will answer our prayers by giving us the

help of His all-powerful grace. In like manner, when we ask God: "Give us this day our daily bread," we must not imagine that He will dispense us from earning our own living, and supply all our wants without our doing our share, our duty in working for it.

A pagan fable will illustrate this important point. A teamster had, after a rain, the misfortune of having his heavily loaded wagon caught in a deep rut in the road, out of which his team was unable to extricate it. The unlucky teamster at last got out of the wagon and began to implore Jupiter to get his wagon out of that rut, saying: "Help, O Jupiter; come help me to get my wagon out of this rut!" Thus he prayed for hours, but prayed in vain, for Jupiter neither came nor helped him to get his wagon out of that rut. But the teamster continued to pray the louder and the more earnestly. At last a certain man who was passing by, said to him: "If you really wish Jupiter to help you to get your wagon out of that hole, why don't you first do something yourself and put your shoulder to the wheel, and then Jupiter will help you." The teamster, who had not thought of that before, took the advice, put his shoulder to the wheel and ordered his horses to pull, and to his astonishment his wagon was soon out of the rut. This fable should teach us that, when we pray to God for some grace, for His help in our need, we also should do our share and put our own shoulder to the wheel, and not

expect God to carry us to heaven without our making any effort, or any sacrifice to get there. He who does all he can, will surely be heard when he prays to God and will then be able to perform what is above his strength, and to do with comparative ease what would otherwise be very difficult. But he who does not do his share, cannot count on God to hear his prayer.

4. CONFIDENCE. Fourthly, confidence is an essential condition of a good prayer. When you pray, says our divine Saviour, "believe that you will receive, and they shall come unto you" (Mark 11. 24). God is our most loving Father; He delights to confer favors upon us, "to do the will of those who fear Him, and He will hear their prayer, and save them" (Ps. 144. 19). We should, therefore, pray to Him with a true and simple, childlike confidence. Is He not the best and most loving and liberal of fathers; is He not almighty, infinitely good, Truth itself, and most faithful to His promise? And has He not solemnly promised to hear our prayers? Should not our confidence in God be, therefore, boundless and firm, in God who loves us as His favorite children, who is all-powerful and perfectly able and willing to grant all that we ask properly? He, therefore, who, when praying to Him, wavers in his confidence, "should not think," says St. James (1. 6), "that he shall receive anything of the Lord." We need not, then, be astonished if, when we pray to God without due confi-

dence, our prayers are not granted. The greater our confidence in God, the greater also will be the help, the graces and favors He will bestow on us. Our confidence in God is the measure of the help He will bestow on us; if our confidence is great, great and numerous also will be His gifts to us. If we receive but little from Him, it is a proof that we have but little confidence in Him. Were we allowed to carry away from an immense pile of gold coins as many as we would wish, we would surely not be satisfied with bringing with us only a little satchel, but we would bring as large a bag as possible, in order to get as many gold coins as possible. Let us so strive in all that concerns our spiritual wants, as if our success depended entirely on our own efforts, and, at the same time, so place our whole confidence in God when we pray, as if our success did not at all depend on our efforts, but entirely on God's assistance. In this manner, we shall do our share, and our confidence in God will most assuredly induce Him to give us all the assistance we may need and many other favors besides.

5. Finally, PERSEVERANCE IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY to the success of our prayer. To show us the necessity of persevering in prayer our divine Saviour related several parables, such as: The man who went to borrow three loaves of bread from his neighbor, the poor widow claiming justice from an unjust judge, and we have also the fact of the Canaanite woman's persistent pleading with Jesus

for the cure of her daughter. These and other examples from the New Testament will be explained further on to show the power of prayer, of perseverance in prayer. God wishes us to appreciate and, in some manner, deserve His graces, His favors. The more they cost us to obtain, the more highly we prize them, and the more apt we are to make a good use of them. "God," says Pope St. Gregory, "wishes to be asked, to be, as it were compelled and overcome by our importunity." And our divine Saviour Himself says: "The kingdom of God suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away" (Mat. 11. 12). Moreover, God defers and even seems to refuse to grant our prayers, in order to test our earnestness, our sincerity; if we ask once or twice only, and then cease to pray, it is a proof we do not deserve to be heard, for then we are not in real earnest or very anxious to be heard; he who feels great need of a thing wants it by all means, and will persevere in asking for it and trying to get it, until his efforts are crowned with success. For instance, he who is in downright earnest in wishing to acquire patience, will pray for it incessantly and, at the same time, will do his share by trying his best to control his temper. Such a one will obtain the object of his desires, for then he will do his share and God will bless his earnest efforts and *gradually* grant him the grace to make progress in that virtue, until he has acquired it. Hence St. Augustine says to us: "Do not despond

and give up praying, for God will surely keep His promise; if He defers granting your prayer, He does not thereby refuse to hear it." Let us persevere in prayer, and our perseverance will in due time be crowned.

Let us bear well in mind that, although God can work miracles without number, He, nevertheless, works them only exceptionally, when they contribute in a special manner to His glory. But if God would always immediately grant our prayers as we desire, He would have to work a miracle almost every time we pray, as we shall presently see. Let us also remember that when the Saviour promised to grant us all we would pray for, He restricted His promise to all we would ask *in His name*, that is, to all that may be *conducive to our salvation*, for, since He is our Saviour, what we ask in His name must have some connection with or reference to Him as our Saviour, and must be therefore conducive to our salvation. But what do we need for our salvation? Chiefly the graces to overcome our temptations and passions, to obtain the forgiveness of our sins, to keep the commandments and practise the Christian virtues. Temptations which we do not overcome lead us into sin and are dangerous to our salvation. If we overcome them, they are occasions of gaining merit and acquiring and practising the Christian virtues and keeping the commandments. When we are tempted, we need only to pray at once and earnestly to God for His help

to overcome the temptation, and so long as we thus pray during a temptation, we shall surely overcome it, and thus keep from sin. If the temptation returns, we have only to pray again as before and strive to turn our attention to other matters, and God's grace will enable us to overcome it altogether. He who has thus prayed when beset by temptations, however violent and protracted they may be, may rest assured that he has not yielded to them, but has overcome them, for in such dangers of salvation, when immediate help is needed, God never defers hearing our prayers.

As to the Christian virtues which we are obliged to practise, such as humility and patience, we can depend on our prayers being heard by God for the help, the graces necessary to practise them. But we cannot expect God to grant them in their full perfection at once, for in the ordinary course of things, this would be a miracle. And why? Because the virtues are *habits* regulating our conduct. Naturally no habit can be acquired without oft-repeated acts during a longer or shorter period of time, which is usually many years; and a habit, even when already acquired, is still perfectible, that is, it can become always more and more perfect. Let us, for instance, take the virtue of patience. By self-examination we have found out that we easily and frequently feel irritable and give way to impatience, and thus commit sin, failing against charity, etc. Wherefore, knowing our weakness, we

have recourse to God and beseech Him to give us the necessary virtue of patience. Now, if God were at once so to impart to us the virtue of patience, that we would no longer yield to irritability, to impatience, it would be as great a miracle, as if God were at once to make a young music pupil become a perfect musician, or make a seven year old child in school a perfect mathematician, or a perfect mechanic, or a first-class chemist! All trades and sciences and arts, like all habits, are naturally acquired by repeated acts performed for years, and so are all the virtues. It takes years to learn a trade, a science, an art perfectly, and even after years there is also plenty of room to become more and more perfect therein. We must say the same of the virtues. The saints made every exertion and prayed very much for the virtue of patience, and it took saints, like St. Francis de Sales, St. Alphonsus and others, 20, 30, 40 or more years to acquire this virtue; and yet most of us, without any great efforts on our part, pretend that God should bestow on us the virtue of patience in its highest perfection after we have more or less earnestly prayed a few days or a few weeks for it! If God were to gratify us, it would, indeed, be a miracle! To all these persons we say: "As you pray God every day to give you your 'daily bread,' and you nevertheless labor to earn it yourselves, so you should also pray daily to God to give you patience and, at the same time, exert yourselves in all earnestness to

watch over yourselves to overcome yourselves to practise patience, and God will surely help you gradually to make daily some progress in practising patience and acquiring that necessary virtue. Whilst praying for what is necessary for your salvation, be sure to do your share and in due course of time success will crown your efforts and your prayers."

As to prayers for the conversion of a sinner, of a non-Catholic, the usual course of divine Providence will be explained further on.

CHAPTER VII. HOW TO RENDER OUR PRAYERS MORE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD AND INCREASE THEIR EFFICACY

Worldlings, our divine Saviour remarks, are wiser in their material affairs than the servants of God are concerning their spiritual interests (Luke 16. 8). Every week almost we hear of new improvements and inventions in machinery, in comforts, in agriculture, in scientific appliances, etc., tending to increase power, efficiency, durability, productiveness, and to lessen human labor. Should we not, then, in the spiritual life, in the matters and means pertaining to salvation, be as ingenious as worldlings are in the things concerning their temporal welfare? Are not our spiritual interests infinitely superior to all temporal interests? We should, therefore, be ever ready by every means in our power to render our prayers more acceptable to God and more efficacious in obtaining from Him the assistance we so greatly need. The reader will find in this chapter some of the principal means which will surely increase the value and power of our prayers.

1. In the first place, the more pure, the more free from sin, the greater our holiness, the more

we are pleasing to God, and the more worthy we are of receiving from Him special graces, favors and benefits, and, consequently, the more powerful and efficacious will be our prayers. Wherefore, let us carefully avoid every wilful and deliberate sin, not only grievous sin, but even the slightest venial sin, for "he that feareth God, neglecteth nothing" (Eccles. 7. 19), that may please or displease Him. That is, just as a dutiful son fears even slightly to displease his good father, so should we, as good, loving children of our heavenly Father, fear even slightly to displease Him by a venial fault. If this is our line of conduct, we may be sure that we are greatly pleasing to Him and that we shall more easily obtain from Him what we pray for, because the Psalmist says: "God will do the will of them that fear Him; He will hear their prayer and save them" (Ps. 144. 19).

2. Whenever we pray, we should imitate our holy Mother the Church, who concludes all her petitions to God with the words: "Through Christ our Lord." It is only through Jesus Christ, through His merits that her prayers have any value before God, any power to obtain divine graces and benefits, and it is only to prayers offered to the heavenly Father in His name, that Jesus Christ has promised efficacy and success. "Amen, amen I say unto you, whatsoever you shall ask of the Father *in My name*, He will give it to you." It is during holy Mass, especially at and after the Eleva-

tion, that our prayers possess the greatest influence and power with God, because Jesus is then truly present on the altar and sacrificing Himself and praying for us, in us and with us. We should, therefore, endeavor to hear Mass as often as we can, daily, if possible. To have a Mass or some Masses said for your intention will most powerfully increase the efficacy of your prayers. Prayers said before the Blessed Sacrament, when visiting our divine Saviour therein, or assisting at Benediction, especially during the 40 Hours' Exposition, have a peculiar power and efficacy. Happy are those who daily or frequently assist at Mass and often visit the Blessed Sacrament. Dear reader, if it is in your power to receive holy Communion daily or frequently, do not fail to do so with love and fervor, and bear in mind that fervent prayer to Jesus present within you after holy Communion, has a special efficacy to induce Jesus to grant you all you ask of Him. Hence never, not even for the whole world, miss a holy Communion.

3. The power and efficacy of our prayers is greatly increased when we offer them to God in honor of or through the intercession of the saints, or invoke their prayers and assistance in our needs. Let us bear in mind that the angels and saints are God's friends and favorites, sharing His own happiness, and that He delights in honoring them and their influence with Him, as He has often manifested this by miracles. Hence the Psalmist thus

expresses his wonder at what God Himself has done to honor His saints: "Thy friends, O God, are made exceedingly honorable" (Ps. 138. 17). The honor shown even by the Church on earth to the saints of God far surpasses the honor shown to earthly heroes and great men. Who now, on earth, honors, loves Plato, Socrates, Alexander the Great, Cæsar and other great men, reputed great heroes? Only few men on earth know their names, and fewer still know anything definite about them, and still fewer care for them. But the saints of God, such as the apostles, the Fathers and doctors of the Church, the martyrs, are well known, admired, honored, revered, loved, invoked and imitated by millions of Christians in every age and nation, for God has always glorified His saints on earth, and has ever been ready to hear their prayers in our behalf. As for the saints themselves, they consider us on earth as fellow-members of the Church of Jesus Christ. They are now secure and enjoy their well-deserved reward in heaven and long to have us to join them in loving and praising God and in sharing their happiness. That they take a lively interest in our welfare is testified by our divine Saviour Himself in His parable of the Lost Sheep, which He concludes with these words: "I say to you, that there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance" (Luke 15. 7). Therefore the denizens of heaven take great interest in both

the just and the sinners on earth, and will surely help by their powerful prayers all who pray for their assistance.

The custom of asking the help of the prayers of our fellow-men, especially of the good, of those whose piety renders them dear to God, is as ancient as the Old Testament itself. The prophet Baruch asks for prayers in these terms, just as we now do: "Pray for us to the Lord our God" (Bar. i. 13). God Himself commanded the three uncharitable friends of Job in these words: "Go to My servant Job . . . and My servant Job shall pray for you: his face (that is his prayer) I will accept . . . and the Lord accepted the face (prayer) of Job . . . when he prayed for his friends" (Job 42. 8-10). This shows that God willingly grants the prayer of a holy person in favor of those who are themselves unworthy of being heard. St. Paul in his epistles often recommends himself to the prayers of the early Christians, as we can see by a few texts chosen among many. "I beseech you, brethren, through our Lord Jesus Christ and by the charity of the Holy Ghost, that you help me in your prayers for me to God" (Rom. 15. 30). "Brethren, pray ye for us" (I Thess. 5. 25). "We cease not to pray for you" (Col. 1. 9).

We may even invoke the prayers of the souls in purgatory, who, although unable to help themselves whilst expiating their slight faults, are the friends of God soon to be admitted to enjoy His presence

as their reward, and are therefore very dear to Him and able to intercede with Him for us. St. Catharine of Genoa, when desirous of obtaining some special grace or favor from God, invoked the aid and prayers of the souls in purgatory and was immediately heard. Among the saints to whom we should specially have recourse is St. Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus Christ,— of whose great power and influence with God there can be no doubt. St. Teresa was wont to testify that she never invoked his assistance without being graciously heard. We should often pray to our Patron Saint and to our holy Guardian Angel, for we have a special claim to their help.

4. "If it is true that the saints are able successfully to intercede with God in our behalf," says St. Alphonsus, "much more is it true of the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God, whose prayers are certainly of greater value in the sight of God than those of all the denizens of heaven together. As we have access to the Father only by means of the Son who is the Mediator of justice, so we have access to the Son only by means of the Mother who is the Mediatrix of grace, and obtains for us by her intercession the gifts which Jesus Christ merited for us by His passion and death on the cross." Her power with God has no limits; she is immediately connected with the divine work of our Redemption, for, in the first place, the Son of God became man only after she had given her consent to become His

Mother; secondly, it was at the sound of her voice saluting Elizabeth that the Redeemer sanctified His yet unborn Precursor, thereby performing, as it were, the first act of the Redemption through Mary's instrumentality; thirdly, it was especially to honor His Mother and show her great influence with Him that Jesus performed His first miracle, as St. Luke's narrative of the marriage-feast at Cana clearly proves. "There was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the Mother of Jesus was there; and Jesus also was invited with His disciples. And the wine failing, the Mother of Jesus saith to Him: They have no wine. And Jesus said to her: Woman, what is that to Me and to thee? My hour is not yet come. His Mother saith to the waiters: Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye. Now there were set there six water pots of stone, according to the manner of purifying of the Jews, containing two or three measures apiece. Jesus saith to them: Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And Jesus saith to them: Draw out now, and carry to the chief steward of the feast. And they carried it. And when the chief steward had tasted the water made wine, and knew not whence it was, but the waiters knew, who had drawn the water; the chief steward calleth the bridegroom, and saith to him: Every man at first setteth forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse. But thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did

Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him " (Luke 2. 1-11).

Every act of Jesus on earth, we should bear in mind, had a definite purpose determined by God from all eternity. The object or purpose of His first miracle was not merely to come to the relief of the married couple and gain the confidence of His first disciples, but principally to manifest His Mother's kind heart and her so great influence over Him, that He could not refuse to gratify her wishes, as we shall now see. Jesus was just commencing His public ministry, and had already gathered a few disciples. He had not yet begun to preach or work miracles, and behold His Mother again appears on the scene in the Gospel, and this time as Intercessor, as Mediatrix with her divine Son, in favor of the needy, for she calls His attention to the lack of wine. But Jesus seems to repulse her, to be unwilling to accede to her wishes. But, in fact, it was no repulse or refusal on His part, for He calls her "woman," a title of honor in the language of the country, equivalent to our word "lady." Remember that now He appeared before men, not as an ordinary man, but in His official capacity, as the promised Messias, the Saviour of mankind, and therefore He considered not relationship or friendship or countrymen, but only the souls of men, just as He had at the age of twelve years, attended, as He said, "to His Father's business." Hence the honorable title He gives to Mary, in-

stead of calling her "Mother"; nevertheless, He is ready to show to men how great is Mary's influence over Him in all that concerns His ministry, the salvation of men. He tells her, indeed, "My hour hath not yet come;" and this was true, for as he had not yet begun to preach in public, it was not yet time for Him to work miracles to prove the truth of His preaching, of His mission. But then why did Jesus fulfil His Mother's wish? Since, as we have just seen, it was not to prove His mission, it must have been principally to show how great an influence His Mother possessed over Him, and how easily she could obtain from Him all that she wished, even if she asked for miracles. The sequel proves not only this, but also that Mary felt certain that Jesus would grant all she asked. Hence she simply told the waiters to get their orders from Jesus, and we know the result from the Gospel narrative.

Finally, when Jesus was about to accomplish His mission as the Saviour of mankind by dying on the cross, He gave us as our spiritual Mother His own Mother, and made us her spiritual children. She is, therefore, most desirous to see God loved and served by all men, to see all men saved, for whom her divine Son suffered and died. She possesses greater influence and power with God than all the saints and angels combined. The saints are only God's servants and friends; but Mary is the Mother of God, and God cannot refuse the prayers of His

Mother. Therefore, we have every reason to place all our confidence in her intercession in our behalf. God is the source of all graces, of all favors, and Mary is the ordinary channel through which we receive them. Just as God gave us our Saviour through Mary, so also God gives us the fruits of the Saviour's Redemption through Mary. Hence Mary's loving and tender benevolence shown at Cana, is continued in heaven, where she reigns over all the saints and angels, and is honored by God far above them all in favor of those who invoke her help, and always with success. Let us, then, always have recourse to Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother, in all our wants, and we shall experience the effects of her love for us and of her boundless power with God.

5. The performance of good works and the acts of self-restraint and self-denial impart a wonderful efficacy to our prayers and enable us to obtain special graces and benefits from God. In the first place, almsgiving has special power together with prayer to induce God to grant favors. It was to his alms and his prayers that the first pagan who became a Christian owed his vocation to the true faith. "There was," we read in the Acts of the Apostles, "a certain man in Cæsarea, named Cornelius, a centurion of that which is called the Italian band; a religious man and fearing God with all his house, giving much alms to the people, and always praying to God. This man saw in a vision manifestly . . .

an angel of God coming in unto him, and saying to him: Cornelius. And he, beholding him, being seized with fear, said: What is it, Lord? And he said to him: Thy prayers and thy alms are ascended for a memorial in the sight of God. And now send men to Joppe, and call hither one Simon, who is surnamed Peter. . . . He will tell thee what thou must do" (Acts 10. 1-6). When King Nabuchodnosor was about to be most severely punished for his sins, the Prophet Daniel told him how he could escape such punishment, saying: "Redeem thy sins with alms and thy iniquities with works of mercy to the poor" (Dan. 4. 24). And we need not wonder at the power of acts of charity towards our neighbor, for does not our divine Saviour expressly declare that "as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me?" (Mat. 25. 40). Secondly, as we shall see further on, the (pharisees or) chief Jews who came to ask Jesus to cure the centurion's servant, urged Him to do so, saying: "He is worthy that Thou shouldst do this for him (the centurion), for he loveth our nation; and he hath built us a synagogue" (Luke 7. 4, 5). In like manner, he who is generous, *according to his means*, to the Church, towards the support of his pastor, of his parish church and the other good works of the parish and the wants of the Church in general, has reason to believe that God will more easily hear his prayers than those who neglect this Christian duty. Thirdly, since self-denial is the first duty of

him who wishes to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, as He Himself declares: "He who wishes to come after (follow) Me, let him deny himself" (Mat. 16. 24), we cannot expect our prayers to be easily heard, unless we practise self-denial both interiorly and exteriorly. Interiorly, by bearing our crosses and trials patiently, by overcoming our impatience, aversion, suspicions, rash judgments against our neighbor, our evil habits; exteriorly, by keeping the abstinence and fasts prescribed by the Church and denying ourselves from time to time the gratification of our curiosity, certain games and amusements, certain delicacies. The more these acts of self-denial cost you, the greater influence will your prayers possess with God. But some people do not know how to practise these little acts of self-denial, which are so pleasing to God. Here is what some good Catholic men would do especially in Lent, on Fridays, and when they were bent on obtaining some divine favor: they would give up smoking, or smoke only once or twice a day, abstain from going to some game, from reading the papers, from some article of food or drink of which they were very fond. Certain good Catholic women in Lent and at other special times would abstain from fruit, sweetmeats, from eating and drinking between meals, from some finery, from light reading and the like. This self-denial, though not very agreeable to nature, nevertheless, imparted to them greater peace of mind and contentment. Try it earnestly,

and it will render you more pleasing to God.

Fourthly, making a Novena is also an efficacious means of obtaining graces and favors from God. A Novena is a nine days' prayer or supplication. A Novena is generally made thus: A certain prayer or certain prayers for a certain specified object are said for nine consecutive days and, after a good confession, holy Communion is received on the tenth day. What prayer or prayers we should say are left to our choice; for instance, we may recite daily nine Hail Marys, or a decade or five decades of the rosary, a litany, hear holy Mass, make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, etc. To the prayers we recite we may join a certain alms, a certain act of self-denial, or some other good work, according to our devotion or to the circumstances in which we are placed. But our prayers, our good works should be performed with earnestness and fervor. Our Novena will be still more efficacious, if we have the Sacrifice of the Mass offered for our intention once or oftener during the Novena. If in our power, it would be well, if we would request others, especially good and pious souls, to join us in our Novena. Novenas may be made, for instance, in honor of or to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in honor of the Blessed Virgin, of Our Lady of Mercy; of Good Counsel, of Lourdes, of Perpetual Help, to Mary Refuge of sinners, in honor of St. Joseph, St. Gerard Majella, etc. Prayers and Novenas may be addressed privately to persons who

have died in the odor of sanctity, especially if the Cause or Process of their Beatification has already been introduced, as for instance, Sister Thérèse of the Infant Jesus and the Holy Face. The reason is that God, when He wants to have persons honored as saints by the Church, grants to that end many wonderful favors and even miracles to prove their sanctity. A Novena may be made for the benefit of the souls in purgatory to obtain a grace or favor through their intercession. Moreover, they who make a Novena for a certain grace, usually promise to God some prayer or good work as a thanksgiving, if their prayer is granted. For instance, if their prayer is granted they will hear Mass daily, or every Saturday for a year or more, or will go weekly to confession and holy Communion, or abstain from certain delicacies or beverages for a stated time, or from certain comforts or amusements, or perform certain penances, etc. Beware of promising too much, or of undertaking certain rigorous penances without your confessor's special permission. And if your prayers have been granted, show your gratitude to God by thanking Him from your inmost heart, and faithfully performing your promises. If your prayers have not been heard in the manner you desired, do not murmur or complain, but be resigned to God's holy will, and feel confident that He has given or will give you something else more necessary or useful to you, for never is a true and sincere prayer lost.

CHAPTER VIII. SOME PRACTICAL LESSONS ON PRAYER IN THE GOSPEL NARRATIVE

We have seen in the foregoing Chapters, first, that prayer is absolutely necessary for salvation; secondly, that, if made with the proper dispositions and in the proper manner, prayer is all-powerful and efficacious; thirdly, that prayer in itself is so easy as to be in the power of every man, wherever he may be, and whenever he wishes. It follows from all this that we can offer no valid excuse for not praying, and that, if we do not save our soul and reach our place in heaven, it will be entirely our fault, for it will be owing to our wilful neglect of prayer. God wills our salvation, for St. Paul says: "God willeth all men to be saved" (I Tim. 2. 4). He is, as we have seen, ever willing and ready to help us to do all that is necessary for our salvation, if we only ask Him for His assistance; and with His assistance we become all-powerful and can perform all that is required for salvation. Without His help, however, we can do nothing for our salvation. And if we do not obtain His help, it is because we do not want it, for, if we did, we would surely ask it of Him.

Some persons have a kind of wish to be saved, but they want God to do it all for them, without their having to do their share; they are like that pagan who expected Jupiter to extricate his wagon from the rut, without his being obliged to put his shoulder to the wheel. He who earnestly desires to save his soul, willingly does all in his power to succeed, and by frequent and fervent prayer asks God to help him with His all-powerful grace, and he will surely succeed. God in His goodness has His hand always stretched out to us to help us along the precipices in our road to heaven; to keep ourselves from a fatal fall into the abyss below, we have only to take hold of God's hand and be saved; if we will not take hold of His hand, and therefore fall to destruction, it is our own fault. We can take hold of God's almighty hand by prayer; if we pray, our salvation is assured; but woe to us, if we neglect praying to Him.

The following narratives from the Gospel will plainly manifest to us the dispositions with which our prayers should be accompanied, in order to deserve that God should grant us what we pray for. To derive real profit therefrom, the reader should read them slowly and attentively; and should, moreover, reflect on them, if he earnestly desires to profit by the lessons they convey.

I. THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

Luke 18. 10-14.

“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a pharisee, the other a publican. The pharisee, standing, prayed thus within himself: O God, I give Thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, as also is this publican. I fast twice in a week; I give tithes of all I possess to the poor. And the publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes towards heaven, but struck his breast, saying: O God, be merciful to me, a sinner. I say to you, this man went down into his house justified, rather than the other; because every one that exalteth himself, shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

Here are two persons performing the same action, praying to God. But how different before God are these acts! How good, pious and zealous does the pharisee appear! And does not every one consider the publican as “a hard case”? But how different is the judgment of God!

The pharisee aims at publicity, at being considered holy by his fellow-men; he is all puffed up by his sham holiness, and prefers himself to every one, and despises and condemns his neighbor. His prayer is no prayer at all; though he pretends to thank God for being better than his fellow-men, yet it is not out of sincere gratitude, for sincere

gratitude is humble and is not swelled with pride on account of acknowledged benefits received. Moreover, his pretended prayer is no prayer at all. All genuine prayer renders humble homage and gratitude to God for His benefits, expresses or implies sorrow for shortcomings, and implores divine benefits; but there is none of these things in the pharisee's prayer. He makes himself the object of his own admiration, boasts of his being sinless and pious and charitable and shows utter contempt for all men.

Let us now turn our attention to the publican. He is a model of a penitential humility. The humility of his posture, attitude, bearing and words attest his sincerity. His words are few but evince the deep earnestness and emotion of a truly contrite heart. He thinks not of others, but only of his own failings, in order to bewail them and implore their forgiveness. His is a prayer full of humility, confidence and of the spirit of penance. He is sure to obtain forgiveness, for "God does not despise a contrite and humble heart" (Ps. 50.), and "the prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds . . . and he will not depart till the Most High behold" (Eccli. 35. 21).

Let us always be mindful that God does not judge from appearances, but from our interior dispositions, for He sees our heart, our inmost thoughts, and can never be deceived. "He is therefore moved to show mercy only by a heart full of com-

punction," says St. Bernard. "He resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (I Pet. 5. 5). Hence, in heaven only the humble are found. Let us, then, take to heart the admonition of St. Peter: "Be you humbled therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in the time of visitation" (I Pet. 5. 6); and "let us humble our souls before God, and continue in humble spirit in His service" (Judith 8. 16).

2. CURE OF THE SERVANT OF THE CENTURION

Mat. 8. 5-13; Luke 7. 2-10.

"The servant of a centurion who was dear to him, being sick, was about to die. When the centurion had heard of Jesus, he sent unto Him the ancients of the Jews, desiring Him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they besought Him earnestly, saying to Him: He is worthy that Thou shouldst do this to him, for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. And Jesus said: I will come and heal him. And Jesus went with them. And when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent his friends to say to Him in his name: Lord, trouble not Thyself, for I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof. For which cause neither did I think myself worthy to come to Thee; but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed; for I also am a man subject to authority, having under me soldiers;

and I say to this one, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. And Jesus, hearing this, marveled, and said to them that followed Him: Amen, I say to you, I have not found so great a faith in Israel; and to the centurion's messengers, Go, and say to him (the centurion), as thou hast believed, be it done to thee. And they who were sent, having returned to the house, found the servant whole (well) who had been sick."

1. The centurion, whose servant was sick, was a pagan officer of the Roman garrison of the city. He seems to have been a very worthy man, kind and generous to the Jews, a conquered people, and to their religion, as well as a model officer and master full of a kind charity towards his soldiers and subordinates and servant. His first request to Jesus through the ancients of the Jews and his second through special messengers prove him to have possessed faith and confidence in Jesus in a very high degree joined to a humility until then unparalleled. He did not consider himself, a pagan, to be worthy to approach and speak to Jesus or to have Him enter his house and be honored with His presence therein. He showed his extraordinary faith in the power of Jesus, in expressing his belief that Jesus could cure his servant with a single word or act of His will, without either seeing or approaching the servant. This faith caused Jesus to express His admiration for it by declaring that He had not

found so wonderful a faith among the whole Jewish nation.

2. In the next place, his great confidence in the power and goodness of Jesus is clearly apparent from his request to Jesus to heal his servant who, being at the point of death was beyond all hope of cure, and his implied comparison between his subordinate authority over his soldiers and servant, and the unlimited power his very request implied and attributed to Jesus over sickness and health, over life and death.

3. His petition for the cure of his servant should serve as a model for our petitions to God. As he considered his prayer for the cure of his servant a matter of great importance to both himself and his servant, he strengthened it by availing himself of the intercession of the chief Jews of the city, whom he believed to possess some influence over Jesus. In like manner, whenever we have some important petition or favor to ask of God, let us call in the saints, who are God's friends and favorites, or the Blessed Virgin Mary, "the Mother of our Lord," to intercede for us by their prayers in our favor. In the second place, let us always pray with a great faith in God's power, a firm confidence in Him who is goodness itself and our most loving Father and Benefactor, and especially with a deep and sincere humility like that of the centurion, which our holy Mother the Church admires so much, that she requires the humble assertion of the centurion to be

thrice repeated with the striking of the breast before receiving holy Communion: "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof; but say only the word and my soul shall be healed." If all our prayers are enlivened with similar faith, confidence and humility and strengthened by the intercession of the Mother of God or of His saints, they will have the same success as that of the centurion.

3. THE STORM

Mark 4. 35-40; Mat. 8. 23-27; Luke 8. 22-25.

"When evening was come, Jesus said to His disciples: Let us pass over to the other side (of the sea). And sending away the multitude, they take Him even as He was in the ship; and there were other ships with Him. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that the ship was filled. And He was in the hinder part of the ship, sleeping upon a pillow, and they awake Him, and say to Him: Master, doth it not concern Thee that we perish? And rising up, He rebuked the wind, and said to the sea: Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was made a great calm. And He said to them: Why are you fearful? Have you not faith yet? And they feared exceedingly; and they said to one another: Who is this (thinkest thou) that both wind and sea obey Him?"

1. The stormy sea represents the world with its temptations and trials. The voyage on the sea is a figure of our life through the world on the way to our home, heaven. Being placed in the frail bark of our body exposed to the stormy elements of dangers both corporal and spiritual, we are sailing towards our destined harbor, heaven. Happy we, if Jesus is with us in our hearts. He is our Captain, His Providence is our Pilot, His words, His teaching, our compass, faith is our sail, its profession, our flag, hope and confidence in Jesus Christ, our anchor, prayer, holy Communion, our provision, the cross, our mast, heaven, which we should ever keep in view, our destiny and harbor of rest and enjoyment.

2. Why did our divine Saviour, who well knew beforehand that a great storm would overtake the boats, wish to start on that voyage? A good and favorable wind does not try the pilot's skill or merit, but a storm does. Jesus wished to show His apostles how greatly they were dependent on Him and should rely upon Him and have recourse to Him with confidence in all their wants, in all their dangers, in every distress. Although Jesus was asleep, He nevertheless was watching over them, but He wished to teach them to have recourse to Him with confidence in their dangers, in their needs. And when they did so, He at once calmed the storm by His almighty power. Then He reproached them for the want of confidence and the

fear that they displayed, though they knew He was with them. The inquiry as to who Jesus was, on account of His power over the elements in fury, proceeded, not from the apostles, but from the inmates of the boats that accompanied them.

3. All physical evils, storms, diseases, sufferings, as well as dangerous temptations are the result of the entrance of sin into the world. And ever since then man has to struggle, combat and suffer to reach his destined place in heaven. Moreover, we are of ourselves weak and helpless amid these storms more or less furious, and we cannot expect to reach heaven by a smooth road devoid of obstacles. Hence our path is beset by crosses and trials, by combats more or less severe with the devil, the world and even our own selves, our inordinate inclinations. Without divine grace or help we can effect nothing. Hence when the storms of temptation and trials become violent, we must at once have recourse to Jesus for His necessary assistance. Sometimes these storms become violent and protracted and threaten us with destruction, and Jesus seems to be asleep and have no care of us; but not so, for if we show our faith and confidence by fervent and persistent recourse to Him to save us, to keep us from sin, He will at once come to our assistance and help us to weather the storm and even often He will instantly quell the storm and enable us to gain a complete victory. If we sincerely endeavor faithfully to serve Him and carry Him in our

hearts, we need have no fear, but we should place all our confidence in immediate prayer, for He says to us: "Cry to Me, and I will hear thee" (Jer. 33. 3); "Call on Me, and I will deliver thee" (Ps. 49. 15). The more we have to combat and suffer, the greater will be our merit and our reward. Let us remember the saying of St. Paul, that "no one is crowned, unless he strive lawfully" (II Tim. 2. 5).

4. THE PARALYTIC

Mat. 9. 2-8; Mark 2. 2-12; Luke 5. 18-26.

"When it was heard that Jesus was in the house, many came together, so that there was no room; no, not even at the door; and He spoke to them the word. And they came to Him, bringing one sick of the palsy, who was carried in a bed by four men. And they sought means to bring him and to lay him before Jesus. And they could not find by what way they might bring him in, on account of the multitude. They went upon the roof, uncovered it, and let him down through the tiles with his bed into the midst before Jesus. And when Jesus had seen their faith (and that of the sick man), He said to him: Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. There were some scribes and pharisees sitting there; they began to think in their hearts: Who is this that speaketh blasphemies? who, but God alone, can forgive sins? And Jesus, knowing their

thoughts, saith to them: Why do you think evil in your hearts? Which is easier to say to this man sick of the palsy: Thy sins are forgiven thee, or to say: Arise, take up thy bed and go into thy house? But that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, He saith to the sick of the palsy: I say to thee: Arise, take up thy bed and go into thy house. And immediately he arose before them, took up his bed on which he lay, and went away in the sight of all to his own house, glorifying God. And all were astonished; and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying: We have this day seen wonderful things."

1. In the first place, let us admire the charity of these four men towards their suffering, helpless fellow-man, and leaving their own work and giving their time to the hard and laborious task of bringing him and placing him before Jesus, as well as their ingenuity and great faith and confidence in the power and goodness of our Saviour.

2. The evangelists tell us that it was their great faith as well as that of the paralytic which moved Jesus to cure the helpless sufferer. But before curing his body, Jesus wished to cure his soul, which was probably in a more deplorable condition than his body. It frequently happens that sin is the cause of men's diseases; physicians testify that the gratification of the passions causes a large percentage of the diseases that afflict mankind. Hence many commentators on the Gospel hold that this

paralytic was suffering on account of his sins. Jesus seeing his faith and his hearty sorrow for his sins which had brought on his disease, said to him: "Thy sins are forgiven thee;" thus He first removed the cause of his disease, that is, his sins, before removing their effect. Let us never complain of sickness or any other suffering, for how often are they not the effect or a punishment of our sins; and even were they not, our resignation and patience will enable us to atone for our sins and also to gain merit for heaven.

3. But the principal object our divine Saviour had in view in curing the paralytic was to prove that He could as truly forgive sins as He could cure corporal diseases by a mere word, for He expressly said so: "That you may know that the Son of man (that is, Jesus Christ as man, in His human nature), hath power on earth to forgive sins," turning to the paralytic, helplessly lying down before Him, He said: "I say to thee: Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house." And the paralytic at once arose, and took up his bed without assistance and, glorifying God for his cure, carried it home. Thus He proved beyond all doubt that He actually possessed the divine power He claimed and exercised of forgiving men's sins, and thus proved and glorified His mission as the Son of God and the promised Redeemer and Saviour of mankind. Hence, when He first appeared to His apostles after His resurrection, He breathed on them, saying: "Receive

ye the Holy Ghost, whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John 20. 22, 23), He thereby actually transmitted to them His power of forgiving men's sins.

4. Let us learn from the paralytic to thank and glorify God every time He answers our prayers. He who is ungrateful, shows he is unworthy of further favors. Let us bear in mind that we can never sufficiently thank God for even the slightest grace or benefit which He bestows upon us, were we even to show ourselves grateful for it every day of our life. He who fails to thank God for His benefits clearly proves that the love of God has no place in his heart.

5. THE RULER'S SON

John 4. 46-53.

"Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee where He made the water wine. And there was a certain ruler whose son was sick at Capernaum. Having heard that Jesus was come from Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and prayed Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Jesus therefore said to him: Unless you see signs and wonders, you believe not. The ruler saith to Him: Lord, come down before that my son die. Jesus saith to him: Go thy way, thy son liveth. The man believed the word that Jesus said to him,

and went his way. And as he was going down, his servants met him; and they brought word, saying that his son lived. He asked therefore of them the hour wherein he grew better. And they said to him: Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. The father therefore knew that it was at that same hour that Jesus said to him: Thy son liveth, and himself believed and his whole house."

1. From the above narrative we see that the ruler's power and wealth could not avert sickness or death from his son, and that youth is not secure and possesses no privilege against disease and death. Had it not been for his son's illness, that ruler would probably never have come near Jesus, nor have ever cared for our Saviour. But it was misfortune that brought him to Jesus, as it does so many who would otherwise have forfeited their salvation. Hence for him and for so many even among us, an apparent serious misfortune is a true benefit, a real blessing. Let us bear in mind that the only real evil in itself is sin. All physical evils may, in God's providence, become real blessings and promote and even be necessary for our salvation.

2. The sickness and approaching death of his loved son, perhaps his only son, was a painful trial for the ruler. He had spared no pains, no expense for his son's cure, but all in vain. Hearing of the wonders wrought by Jesus and of His goodness, he regained hope and confidence, and set out to beseech Him to come at once and cure his son; he first

met with a rebuke from our Lord on account of his very imperfect faith, and probably also of his wavering confidence in Jesus, for he thought that Jesus, like physicians, could cure only the sick they had seen and diagnosed. But Jesus said to him: "Unless you see signs and wonders, you believe not." But the ruler, dreading lest even a few moments of delay might prove fatal to his dying son, insisted on Jesus going at once to cure his son, and said to Him: "Lord, come down before that my son die." He, like many Christians of our times, believed that Jesus could help him, but only in his own way, by going with him to his sick son. But Jesus soon made him aware that he was mistaken, for He said to him: "Go thy way, for thy son liveth," that is, thy son is now cured. The ruler believed Jesus, and at once set out for his home. Whenever we ask some favor, some benefit, some grace, some one's conversion from God, we usually expect God to grant it to us in a certain way, within a certain time, and we feel great disappointment, if He does not; we do not consider that God is able to grant the favor to us in many other ways, and that He is the best judge of the way most appropriate, most beneficial to us. Let us imitate the ruler, who having heard the declaration of Jesus that his son was cured, believed Him and at once returned home. On his way he met his servants who had gone out to meet him; they confirmed his belief in the words of Jesus, and the result was the conversion of him-

self and his whole household. Hence the dangerous illness of his son proved a real blessing for himself and family.

As a further practical lesson let us consider a somewhat analogous fact related in the Old Testament. Naaman, the prime minister of the king of Syria, was struck with leprosy, and as he could find no physician or remedy to cure him, the king informed him that in the kingdom of Israel there was a prophet of God who wrought wonderful cures and other miracles, and therefore advised Naaman to go to that prophet. So Naaman, attended, in accordance with his rank, by a large and splendid retinue of soldiers and officials, went from Damascus to Samaria to request the prophet Eliseus to cure him of his leprosy. "So Naaman," we read, "came with his horses and chariots, and stood at the door of the house of Eliseus; and Eliseus sent a messenger to him, saying: Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and thy flesh shall recover health, and thou shalt be clean. Naaman was angry, and went away saying: I thought the prophet would come out to me, and standing, would have invoked the name of the Lord his God, and touched with his hand the place of the leprosy, and healed me. Are not the Abana and the Pharphar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel, that I may wash in them, and be made clean? So, as he turned and was going away with indignation, his servants came to him, and said to him: Father,

if the prophet had bid thee to do some great (difficult) thing, surely thou wouldst have done it; how much rather (shouldst thou do) what he hath said to thee: Wash, and thou shalt be clean" (IV Kings 5. 9-13). Naaman followed this very sensible advice of seeking a cure in the prophet's way, and was at once perfectly cured. As for us, let us be satisfied with God's way in preference to our own.

6. THE WOMAN OF CANAAN

Mat. 15. 22-28; Mark 7. 24-30.

"Jesus retired into the coast of Tyre and Sidon, and entering into a house, He would that no man should know it, and He could not be hid. For a woman, as soon as she heard of Him, whose daughter had an unclean spirit, came in and fell down at His feet. For the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth, and she besought Him that He would cast forth the devil out of her daughter, saying: Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously troubled by a devil. But Jesus answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying: Send her away, for she crieth after us. And He, answering, said: I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel. But she came and adored Him, saying: Lord, help me. But Jesus said: Suffer first the children to be filled, for it is not good to take the bread of the children and

to cast it to the dogs. But she said: Yea, Lord; for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters. Then Jesus, answering, said to her: O woman, great is thy faith; be it done to thee as thou wilt, for this saying (of thine); go thy way, the devil is gone out of thy daughter. And when she was come into her house, she found the girl lying upon the bed, and that the devil was gone out."

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ came on earth to redeem mankind, with the mission from His heavenly Father to preach the Gospel to the Jews, and to prepare His apostles to found His Church and preach the Gospel to all nations. That is why He did not Himself undertake to preach and perform miracles among the Gentiles. His converting the Samaritan woman and preaching a few days among her fellow-countrymen, His cure of the servant of the Roman centurion and the events related in the above extract from the Gospel, are, if I mistake not, the only cases in which He came in contact with the Gentiles. Hence, when He went to the coast of Tyre and Sidon, He wished to remain unknown, and the only event the Gospel relates of His stay there is that mentioned above, just as if it was the only reason for His going there, and thereby teach us a useful lesson concerning prayer.

2. Admirable, indeed, is the conduct of the woman of Canaan! Like the centurion, she is a model of faith and humility in prayer. First, she

prostrates herself, and beseeches Jesus to have mercy on her. Jesus, ever so good, so kind to the meek and humble, seems to ignore her presence, for He pays no attention to her. But she persists, for she wishes to be heard, to have Him show her mercy, by curing her daughter. She persists so much that the apostles can no longer bear to hear her piteous entreaties, and since Jesus pays no attention to her, they beg Him to send her away. But now she continues her plea for mercy, for help with renewed fervor. And Jesus objects that He is not sent to do anything for the Gentiles. She, however, again prostrates herself and adores Him, imploring His help. Then Jesus deeply humbles her by a comparison which would have completely discouraged and even angered any one else. But instead of this she with wonderful faith, confidence and humility, draws therefrom the conclusion that Jesus must not refuse her the crumbs falling from the table of the chosen Jewish nation. Such faith, such humility are victorious over the Saviour Who is all goodness; He openly admires her humble faith and at once grants her request. Indeed, we may now say, "God giveth grace to the humble" (I Pet. 5. 5). Let us, therefore, always humble ourselves and persevere in prayer and we shall surely obtain all that we ask.

7. THE TEN LEPERS

Luke 17. 12-19.

“As Jesus entered a certain town, there met Him ten men that were lepers, and they stood afar off, and lifted up their voice, saying: Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. When He saw them, He said: Go, show yourselves to the priests. And it came to pass, as they went, they were made clean. And one of them, when he saw that he was made clean, went back, with a loud voice glorifying God. And he fell on his face before His feet, giving thanks. And this man was a Samaritan. And Jesus, answering, said: Were not ten made clean? And where are the nine? There is no one found to return and give glory to God, but this stranger. And He said to him: Arise, go thy way, for thy faith hath made thee whole.”

1. Wretched, indeed, was the lot of these lepers. Because of the highly disgusting, usually incurable and very contagious nature of their disease, they were excluded from society, never permitted to enter a dwelling or to approach their fellow-men; they had to warn all who would approach them of the nature of their disease. All who out of compassion wished to offer them food or other articles, had to put it in some open place and then retire, so that the lepers could come and take them. If any of them happened to get cured of the disease, they were not allowed to return among their fellow-men,

till they had shown themselves to the priests for examination and been declared by them to be cured of every appearance of the disease and perfectly sound; and they had then to offer to God and to them the prescribed gift.

2. Ten of these poor wretches seem to have clung together in their misery, which they keenly felt. They came all together in the neighborhood of the place where Jesus was, and standing at the prescribed distance from Him, they in a loud voice besought Him to have mercy on them. It was indeed a great blessing for them to have been able thus to pray to Him, for to pray well is a real and valuable science. These lepers prayed well. Their prayer was humble, for they stood far off, as being unworthy to approach Jesus; it was earnest and fervent, for they felt their misery and prayed with a loud voice; it was full of confidence, for they did not rely on their merits, but on the Saviour's goodness, saying: "Have mercy on us." It was efficacious in kind, for they prayed in common, and God blesses such prayer (Mat. 18. 20), and our divine Saviour has taught us to make use of it, when teaching us the *Our Father*.

3. Jesus answered their prayer, making no distinction of persons, nationality or of gratitude or ingratitude, for He said to them: "Go, show yourselves to the priests," requiring them to show obedience and submission to the Mosaic Law, and reverence to the priests. Their cure was also partly

owing to their faith, for they believed in being cured by Jesus and at once set themselves on their way to show themselves to the priests, although they were not yet cured, for, says the Gospel, "as they went, they were made clean." This shows that their cure was gradually effected as they proceeded on their way to the priests. After they had gone some distance, they found out that their cure was complete. How happy they must have felt, and how great should have been their gratitude to Jesus! The thought naturally entered the minds of all ten to go back and show their gratitude to Jesus. But only one of them gave effect to this thought, to his feelings of gratitude, and returned. And this one was a stranger, a Samaritan, a member of that nation so much hated and despised by the Jews. He returned all the way to show his gratitude, and he did so most humbly, publicly prostrating himself before Jesus, without human respect. His conduct delighted the tender Heart of Jesus. But, at the same time, His Heart was deeply pained at the ingratitude of the nine who would not take the trouble of returning to express to Him their gratitude for the wonderful favor He had done them! The pain He felt was so great that He could not forbear complaining of the almost universal ingratitude, nine out of ten!

3. Among Christians ingratitude to God for His benefits is almost universal. How many ever thank God for the numerous temporal favors they daily

receive from Him! How few even show their gratitude for the spiritual favors and graces God so plentifully bestows upon them; help in temptation, forgiveness of sins. How many sinners cured of the most horrid leprosy of mortal sin, relapse into the same sins again and fall even into still more grievous sins after Lent, after Easter, after a mission or a jubilee! Let us study well this parable with its comments and endeavor in future to derive profit therefrom.

8. CURE OF THE WOMAN TWELVE YEARS ILL,
AND THE RAISING TO LIFE OF THE DAUGHTER
OF JAIRUS

Mat. 9. 18-25; Mark 5. 22-43; Luke 8. 41-56.

“There cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, named Jairus, and seeing Jesus, he falleth down at His feet, and besought Him much, saying: My daughter is at the point of death; come, lay Thy hand upon her, that she may be safe and may live. And Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him, and they thronged Him. And a woman who was under an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing the better, but rather worse. When she had heard of Jesus, she came in the crowd behind Him and touched His garment, for she said: If I shall touch but His garment, I shall be whole

(cured). And forthwith the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the evil. And immediately Jesus, knowing in Himself the virtue that had proceeded from Him, turning to the multitude, said: Who hath touched My garments? And His disciples said to Him: Thou seest the multitude thronging Thee, and sayest Thou, Who hath touched Me? And He looked about to see her who had done this. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before Him, and told Him all the truth. And He said to her: Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be thou whole (healed) of thy disease. While He was yet speaking, some came from the house of the ruler of the synagogue, saying: Thy daughter is dead; why dost thou trouble the Master any further? But Jesus, having heard the word that was spoken, saith to the ruler of the synagogue: Fear not, believe only, and she shall be safe. And when He was come to the house, He suffered no one to go in with Him but Peter, James and John, and the father and mother of the maid (girl); and He seeth a tumult and people weeping and wailing much. And going in, He saith to them: Why make you this ado (fuss) and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed Him to scorn. But He, having put them all out, taketh the father and mother of the damsel and them that were with Him, and entereth in where the damsel

was lying. And taking the damsel by the hand, He said to her: *Talitha cumi*, which means: damsel, (I say to thee) arise. And immediately the damsel rose up and walked; she was twelve years old; and they were greatly astonished. And He charged strictly that no man should know it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat."

I. Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, probably, like the majority of such officials, was not friendly to our divine Saviour; he must, therefore, have waited till all hope of cure for his daughter had disappeared, before coming to Jesus to ask Him to cure her, as He had cured so many sick. His daughter, probably his only child, was his dearest object on earth, and her death he would have considered as his greatest possible misfortune. The dread of her approaching death was in reality the greatest blessing for him, for it humbled and brought him to the feet of Jesus, and caused him to place all confidence in Jesus, as his only hope. In like manner, how often are not the things we call misfortunes real blessings, which remove us from the occasions of sin, show us the vanity of all that is earthly and induce us to seek real happiness in the service of God? How did Jesus receive Jairus? With the greatest kindness and He at once betook Himself on the way with Jairus to his house. In like manner, Jesus is ever ready to receive with the greatest kindness and love every sinner that comes to Him

with confidence and humble repentance praying for forgiveness.

2. On the way to the house of Jairus Jesus performed another miracle, which tended to confirm the confidence of Jairus in His almighty power and, at the same time, rewarded the confidence and humility of a poor suffering heathen woman. She had been suffering constantly for twelve years from loss of blood, and had gone to the most skilful and high-priced physicians and used the most expensive remedies and thereby spent her whole fortune, without obtaining either cure or relief. Having heard of the wonderful cures of our Saviour, she came to Him from a great distance. Jesus was surrounded on all sides by an immense crowd pressing around Him. She, full of faith and confidence in His power, and anxious to be cured, pushed her way through the throngs behind Him, with the intention of coming near enough to Him to be able to touch His garment with her hand, firmly convinced that by so doing she would be cured. Her faith and confidence were at once rewarded. But Jesus demanded of her something more, something that would cost her much and give glory to God and edification to the neighbor. Hence He asked, who had touched Him. The apostles, who had been jostled in every direction by the eager crowds pressing around them, expressed their astonishment at such a question, for Jesus had been touched by

many as they themselves had been. But Jesus turned around to those behind Him, and repeated His question, adding that the touch of a certain person had caused a certain virtue or power to proceed from Him. The poor woman trembling and ashamed prostrated herself before Him, and humbly acknowledged her disease, a disease held in abhorrence by the Jews, and her cure. Hers was an act of great and even heroic humility and edifying gratitude. Tradition tells us that this woman, a Syro-phenician, was a pagan; that to show her gratitude to Jesus and commemorate her miraculous cure, she had a group of statues made representing the miracle of her cure and that this group was set up in a public place in Damascus, and remained there until Julian the Apostate, out of hatred to Jesus Christ, destroyed the statues (about the year 363) and replaced them by a statue of himself which was soon destroyed by lightning. The humility, confidence and gratitude of this woman are well worthy of our imitation.

3. As Jesus, after this episode, this brief interruption, continued on the way to the house of Jairus, a messenger came to tell Jairus that his daughter had just died, and that it was of no use to bring Jesus to his house. But Jesus encouraged him to keep up his hope of her cure and proceeded to the ruler's house. There the preparations for bringing the girl's dead body to the grave, in accordance with the Jewish custom at that time, were

already on the way; Jesus put a stop to them, saying the girl was not dead, but only sleeping, which was true, considering He was about to raise her to life. He entered the house taking with Him only the girl's father and mother and His three favorite apostles, and there taking the girl by the hand, He at once raised her to life, made her walk, and ordered food to be given her and forbade the parents to publish or make the miracle known. Why did He forbid this? First, because He did not wish the girl's parents to boast of the miracle performed in their favor or of their influence with Jesus; secondly, to prevent the numberless visits they would receive of curious persons coming to inquire and see all about the miracle, and the consequent gossip, dissipation and feasting and spiritual dangers connected therewith for the girl and her parents. In the case of the woman cured of an issue of blood, Jesus demanded publicity as we have seen above, because such publicity would redound to the glory of God and promote a spirit of faith, humility, confidence and gratitude.

9. THE LUNATIC CHILD

Mark 9. 13-28; Luke 9. 37-43.

“On the day following when they came down from the mountain to His disciples, He saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes disputing with them. And presently all the people, seeing Jesus,

were astonished and struck with fear; and running to Him, they saluted Him, and He asked them, What do you question among you? And one of the multitude, answering, said: Master, I have brought my son, my only son to Thee. He hath a dumb spirit, who, wheresoever he taketh him, dasheth him, and throweth him down, and teareth him, so that he foameth, and gnasheth the teeth and pineth away; and he bruiseeth him and hardly departeth from him. And I spoke to Thy disciples to cast him out, and they could not. And Jesus, answering, said: O incredulous generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto Me. And they brought him. And when he had seen Jesus, immediately the spirit troubled him; and, being thrown down upon the ground, he rolled about foaming. And Jesus asked his father: How long is it since this (first) happened to him? But he said: From his infancy; and oftentimes hath he cast him into the fire and into waters to destroy him. But if Thou canst do anything, help us, having compassion on us. And Jesus saith to him: If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And immediately the father of the boy, crying out with tears, said: I do believe; Lord, help my unbelief. And when Jesus saw the multitude running together, He threatened the unclean spirit, saying to him: Deaf and dumb spirit, I command thee, go out of him; and enter not any more into him. (The unclean

spirit) crying out and greatly tearing him, went out of him, and he (the boy) became as dead, so that many said: He is dead. But Jesus, taking him by the hand, lifted him up, and he arose and Jesus restored him to his father. And when Jesus was come into the house, His disciples secretly asked Him: Why could not we cast him out? And He said to them: This kind can go out by nothing, but by prayer and fasting."

1. Our divine Saviour had spent the night on Mount Thabor with His three favorite disciples, Sts. Peter, James and John, and, as the evangelists tell us, was transfigured before them; whilst He prayed, the shape of His countenance was altered, His face was shining as the sun, and His raiment became white and glittering. And Moses and Elias appeared in majesty and spoke with Him of His approaching passion and death in Jerusalem; and there came a cloud, and a voice, the voice of the heavenly Father, came out of the cloud, saying: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." In the morning Jesus came down the mountain with His three disciples, and beheld a large crowd around the other nine disciples. These, in the absence of Jesus had in vain endeavored to cast the devil out of a possessed boy; their failure brought them into a warm discussion with a number of Jewish legal lawyers, called scribes, who were bitter opponents of our divine Saviour. Jesus inquired about the subject of the

dispute and the father of the possessed boy replied by stating the sad state to which his only son was reduced by the evil spirit, and that the apostles had not been able to cast out the evil spirit. Jesus then exclaimed: "O incredulous generation, how long shall I be with you, how long shall I suffer you!" These words were addressed, not so much to the boy's father, as to the scribes and other scoffers who, out of sheer malice, rejected and denied His miracles and His mission. Jesus ordered the boy to be brought to Him. When the boy caught sight of Jesus, the evil spirit fearfully tormented the poor child. Jesus then inquired of his father, how long the evil spirit had possessed his boy. "From his infancy," said the poor father, and then added imploringly, "if Thou canst do anything, help us and have compassion on us." This was not said in a spirit of doubt or denial, but rather of a weak faith, hence our divine Saviour sought to confirm and strengthen his faith, by reminding him of the necessity of a lively and confiding faith, saying: "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." As soon as he heard this, the boy's father weeping replied with humility and energy: "I do believe, help my unbelief." This earnest prayer obtained for him the necessary strong and confiding faith, and Jesus cast the evil spirit out of the boy. This shows us what kind of faith will cause our prayers to be heard.

2. The apostles, who had previously been em-

powered by Jesus to cast out devils, when He sent them all over the country two by two to preach and work miracles, could not explain how it was that they had been unable to cast the devil out of the boy. Hence when they had returned with Jesus to the house, they asked Him the reason thereof. Jesus by His answer taught them that for certain great and important favors a simple prayer alone does not suffice, but that persistent prayer must be joined to acts of self-denial, corporal penances and austerities. This is a practical lesson for those Christians, who pray very little and never deny themselves any enjoyment, but indulge their appetite and sensuality, hardly ever keep the precepts of abstinence and fasting, and frequent all sorts of amusements, and nevertheless expect God to grant their every little wish and prayer. Let them remember that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence," and that only those who deny themselves and follow Jesus Christ, can expect to reign with Jesus Christ in heaven.

10. THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS

John II. 1-45.

"There was a certain man sick, named Lazarus, of Bethania, of the town of Mary and Martha, her sister. (And Mary was she that anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) His sisters

therefore sent to Him, saying: Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. And Jesus, hearing it, said to them: This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister Mary, and Lazarus. When He had heard, therefore, that he was sick, He still remained in the same place two days. Then after that, He said to His disciples: Let us go into Judea again. The disciples say to Him: The Jews but now sought to stone Thee; and goest Thou thither again? Jesus answered: Are there not twelve hours of the day? If a man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world; but if he walk in the night, he stumbleth, because the light is not in him. These things He said; and after that He said to them: Lazarus our friend sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep. His disciples therefore said: Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. But Jesus spoke of his death, and they thought that He spoke of the repose of sleep. Then therefore Jesus said to them plainly: Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes, that I was not there, that you may believe: but let us go to him. Thomas therefore, who is called Didimus, said to his fellow-disciples: Let us also go, that we may die with Him. Jesus therefore came and found that he (Lazarus) had been four days already in the grave. (Now Bethania was near Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off.) And many of the Jews were come

to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Martha therefore, as soon as she heard that Jesus was come, went to meet Him; but Mary sat at home. Martha therefore said to Jesus: Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But now also I know that whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it to Thee. Jesus saith to her: Thy brother shall live again. Martha saith to Him: I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said to her: I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me, although he be dead, shall live. And every one that liveth and believeth in Me, shall not die forever. Believest thou this? She saith to Him: Yea, Lord, I have believed that Thou art Christ the Son of the living God, who art come into this world. And when she had said these things, she went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying: The Master is come and calleth for thee. She (Mary), as soon as she heard this, riseth quickly and cometh to Him, for Jesus was not yet come into the town; but He was still in that place where Martha had met Him. The Jews therefore, who were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary that she rose up speedily and went out, followed her, saying: She goeth to the grave to weep there. When Mary therefore was come where Jesus was, seeing Him, she fell down at His feet and saith to Him: Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. Jesus, therefore, when He saw her weeping, and the

Jews that were come with her (also) weeping, groaned in the spirit and troubled Himself, and said: Where have you laid him? They say to Him: Lord, come and see. And Jesus wept. The Jews therefore said: Behold how He loved him. But some of them said: Could not He that opened the eyes of the man born blind, have caused that this man should not die? Jesus therefore again groaning in Himself, cometh to the sepulchre. Now it was a cave, and a stone was laid over it. Jesus said: Take away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith to Him: Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he is now of four days. Jesus said to her: Did I not say to thee, that if thou believe, thou shalt see the glory of God? They therefore took the stone away. And Jesus lifting up His eyes said: Father, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people who stand about Me, I have said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me. When He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice: Lazarus, come forth. And presently he that had been dead, came forth bound feet and hands with winding bands; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus said to them: Loose him, and let him go. Many, therefore of the Jews, who were come to Mary and Martha, and had seen the things that Jesus did, believed in Him."

1. Lazarus was greatly beloved by our divine

Saviour on account of his many virtues and his strong and simple faith. Jesus, whenever He went to Jerusalem always availed Himself of the generous hospitality of Lazarus. Martha and Mary, his two sisters, are mentioned in the Gospel among the pious women who were wont to minister to the wants of Jesus and His disciples during His public ministry. Mary, the sister of Lazarus is the same as Mary Magdalen whose conversion and public penance, reparation and forgiveness of her scandals, to the great indignation of the pharisees are related by St. Luke, and whom Jesus, on a later occasion, declared to "have chosen the best part, which should not be taken away from her" (Luke 7. 36-50; 10. 42). Wherefore, when Lazarus became dangerously ill, his two sisters sent to Jesus the message: "He whom Thou lovest is sick." At that time Jesus was beyond the Jordan, whither He had retired shortly before, when the Jews in Jerusalem had sought to stone Him to death.

2. Martha and Mary in their message did not expressly ask Jesus to come and cure His beloved friend Lazarus, their brother, but they naturally expected, that Jesus would hasten to come and cure him. The very wording of the message implies this; and yet we may assume that in this matter they were resigned to whatever course Jesus would take. Thus also should we in our prayers for matters temporal strive to be resigned to God's holy will, even if not in accordance with our desires.

God's ways are not our ways, and His ways are better than ours, for they are the only ways that will benefit us.

3. After receiving the message of the illness of Lazarus, Jesus Christ seemed to be in no hurry, although He knew that Lazarus was on the point of death, for He remained two days longer in that place, and when He told His apostles that Lazarus was already dead, He proceeded to Bethany only by slow stages, so that when He reached that town, Lazarus had been dead four days. By so deferring His arrival Jesus did far more for the sisters of Lazarus than merely to cure him, for He gave them the occasion of gaining great merit, not only by accepting their brother's death with resignation, but also by not losing, as most of us would have done, their firm faith and loving confidence in Jesus; and besides this He raised Lazarus to life by a most striking miracle in their favor, by a miracle which furnished a palpable proof of His being the Son of God and the promised Saviour of mankind and, as He Himself declared, would give great glory to God.

4. Let us admire the conduct of Martha and Mary. When they met Jesus before their brother's resurrection, neither of them uttered a word of complaint, dissatisfaction or disappointment that Jesus had so long deferred His coming: all they said was: "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Let us learn from their

example not to complain or despond, when God does not hear our prayers when and as we wish.

II. THE PENITENT THIEF

Luke 23. 39-43.

“One of these robbers who were hanged (crucified) blasphemed Jesus, saying: If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us. But the other answering, rebuked him, saying: Neither dost thou fear God, seeing that thou art in the same condemnation. And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done no evil. And he said to Jesus: Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said to him: Amen I say to thee: This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise.”

1. The rule is that “as life is, so is death.” Wherefore we would naturally expect that both of the robbers condemned to be crucified alongside of Jesus, who had until then led a life of sin and crime, would both equally die in sin and be eternally lost. And, nevertheless, this was not the case, for one of them was promised salvation by our divine Saviour and died truly penitent, and the other died impenitent, mocking and scoffing at Jesus, and was lost. St. Alphonsus explains this, saying: “One of them prayed, and was therefore pardoned and saved, and the other did not pray, and therefore died in sin and was lost.” This shows the power of prayer,

and the fearful doom resulting from the neglect of prayer. The prayer of the penitent thief was humble, sincere, contrite and also full of confidence. It was humble, for he had upbraided his companion for his insults to Jesus, reminding him that both of them were criminals deserving of their disgraceful death. It was sincere, for he sought not to excuse or diminish his wickedness; it was contrite, for he was manifestly sorry for his crimes, especially because he contrasted his wickedness with the innocence of Jesus; and it was full of confidence, for he proclaimed Jesus as his Lord, and as having all power and being full of mercy, and besought Him to remember him when He would enter His kingdom. All these necessary dispositions entitled him to the full benefit of divine mercy. Let us not forget that the power of making such a prayer with such dispositions was a great grace God bestowed on him, and the fact that he profited by this grace is due to his having profited by previous graces given him by God whilst he was already hanging on the cross, as we shall now see.

2. The evangelists tell us of the insults, mockery and blasphemies leveled at Jesus raised on the cross between heaven and earth. Both thieves heard them. They also heard the admirable prayer of Jesus praying for His enemies, for those who were mocking and outraging Him so frightfully and shamefully; they witnessed His patience and meekness amid such terrible sufferings and insults. The

penitent thief was at first moved to pity, then to admiration, then to consider Him as more than a mere man, as the Saviour promised to mankind; every moment new light dawned upon his mind concerning Jesus, as it were, step by step; with these graces, for graces they really were, he gradually and faithfully co-operated, and the result was his prayer to Jesus, which secured his forgiveness and salvation. But the other thief heard and saw all that was passing, as well as his companion, but obdurately refused to see and be moved, and joined the Jews in the abuse, the insult and mockery of Jesus, and far from praying, he died in sin as he had lived, and was lost. Noble and admirable indeed was the conduct of the penitent thief, when almost everybody considered, declared and insulted Jesus as an impostor deserving of the most disgraceful of deaths.

3. Let us imitate the penitent thief in his repentance, in his prayer, and however great and deeply rooted our sins are, let us contemplate Jesus on the cross, the image of the crucifix and pray to Jesus as he did, and Jesus will forgive us and fulfil in our regard His prophecy: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things (hearts) to Myself" (John 12. 32).

12. TWO PARABLES

1. "Jesus spoke also a parable to them, that we ought always to pray, and not to faint, saying: There was a judge in a certain city who feared not God, nor regarded man. And there was a certain widow in that city, and she came to him,

saying: Avenge me of my adversary. And he would not for a long time. But afterwards he said within himself: Although I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow is troublesome to me, I will avenge her, lest continually coming, she worry me" (Luke 18. 1-5).

The lesson our divine Saviour wished to teach by this parable was that we should persevere in praying for the divine benefits, of which we stand in need, until we obtain them; that we should so weary God by our prayers that He would *seem* to be compelled by our importunity, by our persistency, to grant us all we ask, apparently as if it were only in order to get rid of us, and not out of kindness and mercy towards us, although He loves to be importuned, as it were, by our prayers, in order to render us more worthy of being heard, and of receiving even more than we actually pray for.

2. "Which of you," said Jesus to His disciples, who had besought Him to teach them how to pray, "shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and shall say to him: Friend, lend me three loaves, because a friend of mine is come off his journey to me, and I have not what to set before him. And he from within should answer and say: Trouble me not, the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. Yet if he shall continue knocking, I say to you, although he will not rise and give him because he is his friend; yet, because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say to you: Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Luke 11. 5-10).

In this parable also our divine Saviour insists on

our persevering in prayer *until* it is granted, for God wishes to be, as it were, importuned and compelled by us to grant us what we pray for; unless we do this, He will not consider us as deserving or sufficiently appreciative of what we pray for. He who ceases praying after praying a few times for a favor without obtaining it, shows that he is not very anxious to get it, or that he does not consider it worth being much prayed for. Moreover, he shows also a great want of humility, since he will not act as a beggar who is in great need, and therefore insists and urges his request again and again; he acts practically, as if he were so great a personage as to require to be treated by God with great condescension. Moreover, he lacks faith and confidence in God as the best of fathers, infinitely good and merciful, who constantly bestows His gifts upon us, who has given even His own beloved Son to the death of the cross in order to save us. Hence Jesus insists on the necessity of faith and confidence in our prayers, saying: "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke 11. 13).

Moreover, God defers granting our prayer for our own advantage, because the longer He defers granting us what we pray for, the greater will be the benefits He will add to what we pray for, provided only we persevere faithfully in prayer. The example of St. Monica will serve as a beautiful and

convincing illustration of this matter. Monica was a very pious woman and when she found out that her son Augustine, at the age of seventeen years, had been led by bad companions into leading a sinful life, had lost the faith and embraced Manicheism, a most absurd heresy, set herself at once to do all in her power to reclaim him, and to pray earnestly to God for his conversion. But all her efforts and prayers seemed to be in vain. She redoubled her prayers, denied herself all amusements, all delicacies, and performed many penances and austerities, many good works that required great sacrifices on her part; followed him to Milan, and left nothing undone to bring about his conversion. The more she prayed, the more she underwent and suffered, the more holy she became, so that all who came in contact with her, revered her as a saint. For sixteen years she persevered in her efforts and prayers and, at last, Augustine was thoroughly converted, and her prayers were fully granted, and more than this by her efforts and prayers for Augustine, she sanctified herself so that the Church has declared and honors her as one of her great saints and a model of all Christians.

If we examine the lives of the saints, we shall discover that it was through persevering prayer that they became saints. Some saints, seeing the necessity of humility for salvation, exerted themselves for twenty, thirty, forty or more years by prayer and their corresponding efforts to acquire humility;

and, as the Christian virtues are so intimately connected together that we cannot become perfect in one without, at the same time, becoming perfect in all the others, when they became perfect in humility, they had already become saints. What enabled Francis de Sales, St. Alphonsus to become saints? St. Francis de Sales for over twenty years strove by persistent prayer and his own corresponding efforts, to overcome his natural irascibility, and succeeded in becoming a very model of meekness and a great saint. For forty years St. Alphonsus acted in like manner to acquire the virtue of patience, and became thereby a great saint. If we henceforth set out earnestly to overcome our greatest defect by dint of *persistent* prayer, accompanied by our own efforts of "putting our own shoulder to the wheel," we shall in the end succeed in saving our soul and attaining "our place in heaven."

13. DO NOT DESPOND, BUT PERSEVERE IN PRAYER

Herman Cohen, known as "Herman the Pianist," because of his wonderful skill in piano playing, was a Jew who was suddenly converted, when taking the place of the absent organist at Benediction in one of the churches in Paris. He later on entered the Order of Carmelites, receiving the name of Augustine Mary of the Blessed Sacrament, and labored in the ministry with extraordinary zeal and success in many places, and led a life of great

austerities. He had the consolation of seeing nearly all the members of the Cohen family become members of the Catholic Church. But his mother, notwithstanding his persistent and fervent prayers to God, his numerous penances and austerities and appeals to her, and appeals to his hearers to obtain her conversion, remained obstinate. She died on December 13, 1855. At that time he was engaged in preaching the Advent course of sermons in Lyons. In a letter to a friend he announced the sad event of his mother's death as follows: "The good God has just struck my heart a terrible blow . . . and I am still uncertain (as to how she died). We have, however, prayed so much for her, that we may hope that something unknown to us has passed between her soul and God in her last moments."

We can easily imagine Father Herman's (as we shall call him) grief on hearing of his mother's death. He had prayed so much and so fervently, and had got so many prayers offered for her conversion, and all seemed in vain, for she had appeared before the divine tribunal without having received baptism. Having one day in a sermon alluded to St. Monica's conversation with her son Augustine on the eve of her death, he exclaimed: "I also have a mother; I have left her to follow Jesus Christ, and she no longer calls me her good son. Her hair is already silvery and her brow is becoming furrowed by age, and I dread to see her die. Oh, no! I do not wish her to die before she

loves Jesus Christ. These many years I have been expecting for my mother, what Monica expected for her son Augustine. And who knows, if God has not attached the grace of her conversion to the fruit that you will draw from my words? ”

Among his prayers for her conversion was the following addressed to the Blessed Virgin: “ Mary, my heavenly Mother, since, for the love of thee, I have left all who were dear to me in this world, for pity’s sake, deign to have compassion on them. Forget not that, for thy sake, I have left my mother also; like thee, she is a daughter of Jacob, and is, therefore, one of thy family. Deign to give her back to me, for thou canst not forsake her. Already her head is bending down towards the grave, that poor mother of mine. O Mary, I implore thee, deign to touch her eye-lid lightly with thy luminous garment, and she shall see, and shall rise up and follow thee; and she shall love Jesus and then come with us to heaven.”

But God seemed to have paid no heed to his prayers, to have refused all his pious and lawful desires. His faith and his love were put to a painful trial. Nevertheless, notwithstanding his deep sorrow, his confidence in the divine goodness was not cast down. On the evening of the very day on which he received the very painful news of her death he was to preach. Many a one, in his place, would have been unable, under similar circumstances, to appear in the pulpit; but after praying and weeping

much, he preached as usual. His subject was *death*, and, according to the testimony of those who heard him preach, his words penetrated deeply into their minds and hearts and produced salutary emotions; and when, in concluding his sermon, he poured out his grief into the bosom of his audience, his words drew forth a universal and deeply felt sympathy.

Not long after he confided to the Blessed Curé d'Ars his uneasiness concerning his poor mother who had died without the grace of baptism. "Be hopeful," replied the man of God, "be hopeful; you shall one day on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8th) receive a letter which will greatly console you." He had almost forgotten that promise, when on Dec. 8th, 1861, six years after his mother's death, a Jesuit Father handed him the following letter written by a well known writer of very pious works on the Blessed Eucharist, who some time later died with the reputation of being a saint.

"On the 18th of October, after receiving holy Communion, I was enjoying one of those moments of intimate union with our Lord, when He causes me to feel His presence in the Sacrament of His love in so vivid and delightful a manner, that faith no longer seems necessary to me to believe in the Real Presence. After some moments He spoke to me, and deigned to explain to me certain points concerning a conversation in which I had taken part

on the preceding evening. I then recalled how, in said conversation, one of my friends had manifested her astonishment that Jesus Christ, who promised to grant everything to prayer, had, nevertheless, shown a deaf ear to the prayers which Father Herman had so often offered to obtain his mother's conversion; her surprise at this almost filled her with discontent, and I had great difficulty in making her understand that it behooves us to adore God's justice without seeking to penetrate His secret designs. I was bold enough to ask my Jesus to tell me, how it happened that His infinite Goodness had been able to resist Father Herman's prayers and refuse to grant him his mother's conversion. Here is His reply: 'Why does Anna always seek to fathom the secrets of My justice, and endeavor to penetrate mysteries which she cannot understand? Tell her I do not owe My grace to any one, that I give it to those I please, and that, in so doing, I cease not to be just, to be Justice itself. But let her know also that, rather than fail in the promises I made to prayer, I would subvert heaven and earth, and that every prayer which has for its object My glory and the salvation of souls, is always heard, if it possesses the requisite conditions.' Then He added: 'And to prove to you the truth of this, I will now make known to you what happened at the moment of the death of Father Herman's mother.' My Jesus then enlightened me with a ray of His divine light and made known to me,

or rather He enabled me to see in Him what I will now endeavor to describe. At the moment when Father Herman's mother was about to breathe her last, while she seemed unconscious and nearly lifeless, Mary, our good Mother, presented herself before her divine Son, and prostrating herself before Him, she said to Him: 'Forgiveness, mercy, O my Son, for that soul about to perish. Yet another moment, she shall be lost, lost forever! Deign then, I beseech Thee, to do for the mother of my servant Herman, what Thou wouldst wish him to do for Thine own, if I were in her place, and Thou in his! His mother's soul he holds as his dearest object; he has a thousand times consecrated it to me; he has entrusted it to my heart's tenderest solicitude. Can I allow it to perish? No, no! This soul belongs to me! I want it; I claim it as my inheritance, as the price of Thy blood and of my sorrows at the foot of the cross.'

"Scarcely had the divine Mother ceased her supplication, when a strong, powerful grace flowed from the Source of all graces, the adorable Heart of our Jesus, and went to enlighten the soul of the poor dying Jewess and instantaneously triumphed over her obstinacy and resistance. That soul then immediately turned with a loving confidence to Him, whose mercy pursued her even in the arms of death, and she said to Him: 'O Jesus, God of the Christians, the God whom my son adores, have mercy on me.'

“In this cry, which God only heard, which proceeded from the inmost depths of the heart of the dying woman, were contained sincere sorrow for her obstinacy and her sins, the desire of baptism, the express will to receive baptism and to live according to the laws and precepts of our holy religion, if she would return to life. This sudden outburst of faith and hope in Jesus was that soul's interior act. At the very moment in which she elicited it, it darted forth to the throne of divine mercy, and the feeble bonds that retained her soul in its mortal envelope, were burst asunder, and she fell at the feet of Him who had been her Saviour before becoming her Judge. Having shown all this to me, our Lord added: ‘Make this known to Father Herman; it is a consolation I wish to grant to his long-borne sorrows, in order that he may bless and cause everywhere to be blessed My Mother's goodness of heart and her power over Mine.’

“Being a complete stranger to Father Herman, the poor sick person, whose hand has just traced these lines, is happy in the thought that they may be able to spread a little consolation and balsam on the ever-bleeding wound of his priestly heart. She ventures to solicit the alms of his fervent prayers, and she is happy in the thought that he will not refuse them to her who, though unknown to him, is united to him by the sacred bonds of the same faith, of the same hope.”

NOTE.—The above facts and letter, on which the Church has passed no judgment, and which are credible on reliable human testimony only, are taken from the *Life of Father Hermann* entitled: *Vie du P. Hermann par l'Abbé Charles Sylvain*, G. Oudin et Cie. Editeurs, Paris, 1909.

The foregoing narrative shows us, among other truths, that God always grants the prayers of those who pray well and with perseverance, although not always in the manner wished for and expected, but in His own way. No prayer that fulfils the necessary conditions of a good and worthy prayer, is ever lost.

CHAPTER IX. WHEN WE SHOULD PRAY

We should pray to God every day, for we stand every day in need of God's assistance, of God's benefits both spiritual and corporal, otherwise our divine Saviour would not have taught it to us in His admirable prayer, the Our Father, in which He enjoins us to ask our Heavenly Father: "Give us *this day* our *daily* bread." Wherefore, he who through wilful neglect, would not pray once a day, would be guilty of a venial sin. He who would neglect all prayer for a whole month, or for two months, would commit a grievous sin for neglecting for such a long time to give to God the honor he owes Him by expressing his belief and confidence in God and the love he owes Him; such is the teaching of St. Alphonsus, Doctor of the Church.

For our daily prayer there is no special time prescribed, so that he who prays to God at any time during the day, would thereby satisfy his obligation towards God; this is the general rule; nevertheless, there are circumstances in which we would be bound at once to pray, and even to pray many times during the day, such as, whenever and as often as a violent temptation to sin arises and assails us, or we are in danger of death, or have to receive a sacrament.

A good Catholic always says his morning prayers, as we shall see later on. Before his meals he asks God to bless him and his food, and after his meals he thanks Him for providing him with food and other benefits, for in the Old Law this was even a special command: "When thou shalt have eaten, . . . take heed diligently lest thou forget the Lord" (Deut. 6. 12, 13). "For all these things bless the Lord, that made thee, and replenished thee with all His good things" (Eccli. 32. 17). A good Catholic, when at work, follows the admonition of St. Ambrose and renders his work meritorious: "We can follow no better order in our employments," says the saint, "than to begin and end them with God." By doing this we sanctify our work and "lay up treasures in heaven" which no one can deprive us of, as our divine Saviour declares (Mat. 6. 20).

In the next place, we should never omit to say the Night Prayers before retiring to rest, as will be said further on. Prayer is as necessary for our spiritual life, for the life of our soul, as breath and food are necessary for our body, as water is necessary for a fish. It is especially necessary when the life of our soul is in danger. As long as we are on earth we cannot escape temptation, and temptation is always more or less dangerous to the spiritual life of our soul. People are lost, not because they wish to be lost, nor because they lack the resolution to avoid sin, but because they neglect to pray

when they are assailed by temptation. We are never more weak or more helpless, or more in need of God's help, than when temptation to sin assails us. God will then surely help us, if we pray to Him for help; but if we do not pray then, we shall be left to our own weakness and easily yield to the temptation and fall into sin. However strong and persistent the temptation, we can surely overcome it, if we at once pray to God to help us, and persist in prayer until we have got rid of it, for prayer will obtain for us God's grace, which will enable us to overcome temptation, as God Himself declared to St. Paul: "My grace is sufficient for thee" (II Cor. 12. 9). Hence whenever we are aware of a temptation assailing us, let us at once say in our heart: "My God, help me! Jesus, Mary, help me! Jesus and Mary, do not let me yield to this temptation and offend God!" St. Alphonsus declares that he who remembers that in temptation he pronounced devoutly the names of Jesus and Mary, in order to obtain their help, may feel assured that he did not yield to the temptation.

We should pray also in all our afflictions, troubles, trials, pains, crosses and sufferings, in all the dangers we meet with, and implore of God, patience to bear them, and holy resignation to His will in our regard, so that they may be profitable to our salvation as a means of atoning for our sins and laying up for us treasures of merit in heaven. Let us in all our wants with a childlike confidence

ask our Father in heaven to come to our relief. And whenever our prayers have been heard, whenever God has bestowed any benefit upon us, let us not fail in the duty of gratitude for His bounty in our regard. This will render us pleasing to God and draw further benefits upon us.

We ought to raise our heart to God from time to time during the day either by renewing our good intention or by some short prayer, such as an act of divine love, as we shall see further on. We should pray whenever we receive a sacrament, or when we are in church, not only during divine service, but even at other times, especially if the Blessed Sacrament is therein. Finally, if there is a time when we should pray, and pray most earnestly, it is when we are in danger of death, and about to appear before the divine Judge to give an account of our whole life and receive our eternal sentence!

MORNING PRAYERS. "To Thee (O God,) will I pray in the morning. Thou shalt hear my voice. In the morning I will stand before Thee" (Ps. 5. 4). It is most appropriate and becoming to follow the example of the royal psalmist, who often alleges his own example of praying to God in the earliest part of the day, as we can see by the following verses of the psalms: "It is good to give praise to the Lord, . . . and to show forth Thy mercy in the morning" (Ps. 91. 2, 3); "O God, my God, to Thee do I watch at the break of day" (Ps. 62.

2) ; " My eyes to Thee have prevented (anticipated) the morning, that I might meditate in Thy word " (Ps. 118. 148). Let us heed the admonition of the Holy Ghost, and never fail to say our morning prayers: " We ought to forestall the sun to bless God and adore Him at the dawning of light " (Wisd. 16. 28) ; " The wise man will give his heart to resort early to the Lord that made him " (Eccli. 39, 6, 7). Why should we say our morning prayers? " Because," says St. Ambrose, " we owe to God the first affections of our heart, the first sound of our voice, the first words of our lips." It is meet that we should give to the Almighty, our Creator and Sovereign Lord, our first thoughts of the day, thanking Him for having preserved us during the night, and asking Him to bless, help and protect us during the day, and making Him an offering of ourselves and of all our thoughts and actions of the day which has just begun. Every one, however busy he may be, can easily do this much every morning, for this takes only a minute or two and can be done whilst we are dressing; our other prayers may be postponed to a more convenient time. Moreover, as St. John Climacus says, " we should give to God the first fruits of the day, and the whole day will belong to God," and will be profitable to our soul. How unchristian, how impolite and unjust is he, who after prolonging his sleep out of sloth beyond his needs, to have no thought of God, his Lord and Benefactor, or for Him! The following

is a short but comprehensive formula for our MORNING PRAYER. (When you awake, offer your first thoughts to God, saying: O my God I give myself entirely to Thee. Then whilst rising make the sign of the cross.) O my God, prostrate before Thee, I adore Thy boundless Majesty; I love Thine infinite Goodness above all things; I thank Thee for all the benefits Thou hast conferred on me, especially for having preserved me during this night. In union with the merits of Jesus Christ, I consecrate to Thee all my thoughts, words, actions and sufferings of this day. I offer them to Thy glory and for the salvation of my soul. With the help of Thy grace I purpose this day to avoid sin and all the occasions of sin. I offer all the indulgences I can gain for the souls in purgatory. O my God, for the love of Jesus Christ, preserve me this day from all sin. And Thou, O my Jesus, grant by Thy merits that I may always be faithful to Thee. O Mary, my Mother, bless me this day and protect me from all evil. My holy Guardian Angel and all my Patron-Saints, pray for me. Amen.

Then add three Hail Marys in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and one Our Father and one Hail Mary in honor of your holy Patron.

Before beginning an action, make a good intention, saying: All for Thee, O My Jesus, all for Thee.

NIGHT PRAYERS. St. Bernard writing on Night

Prayers, says: "Suppose you had been blind, deaf and dumb, or a cripple, and a certain physician had, with a wonderful remedy, cured you instantaneously. How grateful you would be to so great a benefactor, when on the night after your cure, you would lay down to rest for the first time in your life in perfect health! And now how can you retire to rest without thanking God, who on that day and every day of your life has given you sight, hearing, speech and the use of your limbs, life and health, and provided you with food and all the other necessities of life? When you give a small alms to a very needy person, he does not go away without thanking you. And God has fed you and provided for your wants all the day long, and, moreover, to Him you owe all you have and all you are; how can you, how dare you retire to rest at night without a word or a thought of sincere thanks to Him who never ceases to bestow upon you priceless benefits! Your servants, the members of your household bid you good night, and you thank them for it, although it is not in their power to give you a good night! But to God, who alone can give you a good night, you would fail to offer Him due thanks, or a prayer to continue His benefits in your regard! How ungrateful! How wicked is such a conduct!"

Comparatively few Catholics neglect to say some prayers before retiring to rest at night. Those who never pray at night are spiritually in a very bad and dangerous plight, for experience tells us that such

persons have practically given up prayer altogether, and there is but little hope of their salvation.

There are many reasons why the father of a family should assemble his whole household every night for night prayers in common, as was the universal custom formerly. He owes this to his household on account of his obligation to give them a good example and to see that they perform their duty to God as well as himself. The spirit of charity, union and concord reigns in the families that say their prayers together every night. Moreover, experience proves that a special blessing of God dwells in such families and in each of its members, and that there is no scandal to bring sorrow and shame in their happy homes. May this practice, so Catholic and so pleasing to God, soon become universal among the Catholics of our country! The following is hereby recommended as a short

FORMULA OF NIGHT PRAYERS. After making the sign of the cross, say: O my God, I thank Thee from my inmost heart for all the graces and benefits Thou hast conferred on me, especially for having called me to the true faith, for having given me Jesus Christ as my Saviour, the Blessed Virgin as my Mother, and for having preserved me this day. (Here briefly examine your conscience: What sins have you committed this day in thought? in word? in action? by omission? After answering inwardly each question, say from your very heart:)

O my God, I have repaid with ingratitude Thy

numberless benefits. I detest my sins, because they displease Thee, who art deserving of all my love; I repent of them with my whole heart. Forgive me through the merits of Jesus Christ. Let me not die in my sins as I deserve. I am firmly resolved, with the assistance of Thy grace, not to sin any more, to confess my sins as soon as possible and to amend my life.

O my God, who art the infallible Truth, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, I believe all that the Holy Church proposes to my belief, because Thou hast revealed it to her. I believe that Thou rewardest the just forever in heaven and punishest the wicked forever in hell. I believe that Thou art One in Essence, and three in Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. I believe in the incarnation, the passion and the death of Jesus Christ. I thank Thee for having made me a Christian, and I protest that I will live and die in this faith.

O my God, trusting in Thy promises, and because Thou art faithful, powerful and merciful, I hope through the merits of Jesus Christ, for the pardon of my sins, final perseverance and the glory of heaven.

O my God, because Thou art infinite Goodness and worthy of infinite love, I love Thee with my whole heart above all things. I love my neighbor as myself for the love of Thee, and for Thy sake I forgive all who have injured me.

Bless, O Lord, all my relatives and acquaintances and benefactors, my friends and my enemies. Protect, direct and bless our Holy Father the Pope, our bishop and all the bishops and priests of Thy holy Church, my pastor, my confessor, and all my superiors both spiritual and temporal, and all religious. Help the poor, the afflicted, the tempted, the persecuted, prisoners and travelers, the sick and the dying. Convert all heretics, unbelievers and all sinners, assist all in danger of soul and body, and grant perseverance to the just. O God of mercy, have pity also on the suffering souls in purgatory, especially on those for whom it behooves me to pray, and give them eternal rest.

O my God, I beseech Thee to preserve me this night from all evil. I take this rest to please Thee, and with my every breath I intend to love, thank and praise Thee as the saints and angels do in heaven. O Mary, my dear Mother, bless me and protect me and pray for me now and at the hour of my death. Holy Guardian Angel and all my holy Patron-Saints, intercede for me. Amen.

(Recite three Hail Marys in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and one Our Father and one Hail Mary in honor of your holy Patron. When in bed say:)

It is appointed for me to die once; I know not when, nor where, nor how; but what I do know is that, if I die in mortal sin, I shall be lost! (If you are in mortal sin, make as perfect an act of con-

trition as you can and resolve to go to confession as soon as possible).

EJACULATORY PRAYERS. "Where your treasure is," says our divine Saviour, "there your heart is also" (Luke 12. 34). Where our heart is, there also are our thoughts. The lover very often, if not constantly, thinks of his beloved. Whatever his occupations, wherever he may be, his thoughts affectionately revert to his beloved. In like manner, he who loves God very much, often thinks of God, often gives expression in his heart to the love he has for God by short, but fervid, prayers, which are the aspirations of his loving heart to his beloved Lord, who is everywhere present. These short prayers are usually called ejaculatory prayers, because they are like fiery darts of love bursting forth from the furnace of divine love pent up in his heart. The more intense the divine love, the more frequent and vehement are these prayers.

It is by means of such prayers that we can fulfil the injunction of St. Paul to the early Christians: "Pray without ceasing" (I Thess. 5. 17); "Praying at all times in the spirit" (Eph. 6. 18); "I will that men pray in every place" (I Tim. 2. 8). We cannot all the time pray or reflect on divine and holy subjects, because it is not physically in our power; but we can frequently during the day recall God's presence and raise our heart to Him by a short aspiration or prayer, no matter where we are, or in what occupations we may be engaged. This

we can do without being observed by any one, without ceasing or interrupting our employment. St. Ignatius, even when overburdened with business, was accustomed to raise his heart to God by a fervent ejaculatory prayer every time he heard the clock strike. St. Alphonsus always found means to recite a short prayer every quarter of an hour. St. Vincent de Paul, even when in company of the great, would do the same. The example of these saints is imitated by all persons who earnestly endeavor to sanctify themselves, and should be imitated especially by all who can scarcely find time to devote to prayer.

Precious, indeed, are the effects of the habit of making frequent ejaculatory prayers. "He who desires to make progress in divine love," says the pious and learned Denis the Carthusian, "should very frequently raise his heart to the Lord in terms of affection. If he perseveres in this, he will soon have the happiness to cast out of his heart all worldly attachments and worry, and the love of God will flourish therein." "He who frequently makes ejaculatory prayers," says St. John Chrysostom, "closes the door of his mind and heart to the devil, and prevents him from disturbing him by evil thoughts." "Often raise your mind and heart to God," says St. Francis de Sales, "and therefrom shoot forth fiery short prayers, adoring Him, doing homage to His infinite Majesty, invoking His omnipotence, offering yourself to Him very often dur-

ing the day, praising His infinite Goodness, manifesting the affections of your heart for Him in every possible way. By doing this with boundless confidence your soul will experience the impressions of the divine protection. Without habitual ejaculatory prayers it will be impossible to lead a truly devout life." On the other hand, he who perseveres in the habit of making them frequently and fervently, will easily learn how to make mental prayer, and become a man of prayer. A man of prayer is one to whom prayer is a second nature, like breathing, who has no difficulty in having recourse to prayer on every occasion, in every want.

Some examples of ejaculatory prayers. O my God, I love Thee. My God, I believe in Thee, I hope in Thee, I love Thee with all my heart. Lord, teach me how to pray. Jesus, give me patience. Jesus, help me. Mary, help me. "O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me" (Ps. 69. 2). O Lord, have mercy on me. Forgive me, O my Jesus. O my Jesus, make me faithful to Thee. May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be loved everywhere. O sweetest Heart of Jesus, I implore that I may love Thee more and more. Blessed be God. Blessed be His holy Name. Blessed be the Name of Jesus. Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament. Thy will be done, O my God. Heart of Jesus, burning with love of us, inflame our hearts with love of Thee. Sweet Heart of Jesus, be my love. Saviour of the world,

have mercy on us. Virgin Mother of God, pray for us. O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to Thee. Mary, my Mother, show thyself a mother to me. Mary, our hope, have compassion on us. Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother. Mary, Refuge of sinners, pray for me. Our Lady of Perpetual Help, pray for me. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen. St. Joseph, friend of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, pray for us. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul; Jesus, Mary and Joseph, assist me in my last agony; Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul with you in peace. Holy Guardian Angel, help me, protect and pray for me. By thy holy and Immaculate Conception, O Most Blessed Virgin Mary, purify my body and sanctify my soul. My sweetest Jesus, be not my Judge, but my Saviour. Jesus, my God, I love Thee above all things. Blessed be the most Sacred Eucharistic Heart of Jesus! Divine Heart of Jesus, convert sinners, save the dying, free the holy souls in purgatory. Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, burning with love of us, inflame our hearts with love of Thee.

CHAPTER X. THE OBJECTS OF OUR PRAYERS

The objects of our prayers are, first, the things or the objects we ask of God, and secondly, the persons in whose behalf we pray to God.

I. THE OBJECTS OR THINGS WE SHOULD ASK OF GOD. 1. Since our soul, which is the image and likeness of God, is incomparably more noble and precious than our body, and our final end, our principal and only indispensable obligation in this life is to save our soul, we are bound to pray, first of all and before all else, for the wants of our soul, that is, for its salvation, and all the rest is secondary. Such is the command of our divine Saviour: "Seek first," He says to all men, "the kingdom of God and His justice," that is heaven, His kingdom, and the means of keeping the commandments of God, which His justice, His sovereign rights over us require us to keep faithfully, "and all the rest," that is, all that concerns our corporal and temporal welfare, "shall be added unto you" (Mat. 6. 33). Our divine Saviour does not wish us to bestow our principal care on our temporal welfare, nor to worry about our material wants; and He promises us that, if we faithfully direct all our aspirations and all

our efforts to our salvation, He will Himself supply our earthly wants either directly, or will enable us to do so ourselves without there being any need for us to worry about them or letting them interfere with our salvation. We have a tangible proof of this in the case of those who have given up all their goods for His sake to follow Him and imitate His life and virtues, as is done by the members of the religious orders. So long as they are faithful to their obligations, God Himself provides for their material wants. Let us bear in mind that our divine Saviour does not mean that we should only pray and attend only to the needs of our soul, and not occupy ourselves at all with our bodily wants, for, since the fall, man is condemned to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow, and he must, therefore, work; but he should not worry so about temporal things or labor so as to neglect his salvation. He who conscientiously strives to save his soul, may depend in all safety on God to help him in his material wants.

Which are the needs, the wants of our soul? The forgiveness of our sins and all that is required to obtain it; grace to avoid sin and its occasions, to overcome temptations, to correct our habitual faults and resist our evil inclinations, to keep the commandments, to fulfil the duties of our state or position in life, to bear patiently our crosses, trials, hardships and sufferings, to make the necessary sacrifices our duties demand of us and to persevere un-

til death in the grace and friendship of God. As to those who have not yet entered a state of life, they need light to know to which state God calls them and for which He has fitted them to enable them to save their souls, and also the strength to follow the path God has marked out for them to reach the place He has destined for them in heaven. Those who fail to enter the state of life to which God calls them, and for which He has fitted them, expose the salvation of their souls to great risks. For instance, if he whom God calls to the religious state or to the priesthood, were to neglect God's call and enter the married state, or *vice versa*, he would greatly risk his salvation, for he would be in a state for which God had not fitted or intended him. Moreover, one of the principal duties of those who are called to the married state is to choose their partner in life in accordance with the laws of God and His Church and the dictates, not of caprice, fashion or passion, but of sound reason enlightened by faith. These important matters should be the object of their earnest prayers.

2. As for our corporal or material wants we *should* pray God for our *daily bread*, according to the injunction of our divine Saviour in the Our Father: "Give us *this day our daily bread*." Wherefore, we should pray *each day* for the *corporal necessities* of *that day*, and, as required in all our other prayers, we must, moreover, *do our share* to procure these *necessaries*. For the *things* that

are over and above our necessities, we *may*, but are not obliged to pray for them, and if we pray for them, we should do so only *conditionally*, asking God to grant them to us, provided they will not endanger, hinder or prove fatal to our salvation. Does not experience prove that many who were previously good, practical, virtuous and exemplary Catholics before bettering their material condition, afterwards have gone astray and followed the road of perdition? Hence let us adopt the sentiments of the Wise Man and pray thus: "Lord, give me neither beggary nor riches; give me only the necessities of life; lest perhaps, being filled, I should be tempted to deny and say: Who is the Lord? or, being compelled by poverty, I should steal and fore-swear the name of my God" (Prov. 30. 8, 9).

As to crosses and trials, sickness and suffering, we may pray God to free us therefrom, provided this would not endanger our salvation. At the same time we should say to God: "Lord, if these crosses and sufferings are necessary for my salvation, I accept them from Thy loving hand, but deign to grant me patience, resignation to bear them as long as Thou wilt. May Thy holy will be done, and not mine!" Ask Him to grant you the grace to bear them without discontent, without murmur, and beware of the great sin of charging God with injustice or cruelty in permitting you, great sinner as you are, to suffer a little as a penance for your sins, as a means of gaining merit for heaven and

returning love for love to Him who died so cruel and shameful a death to save you from the eternal punishment you deserved. Had we a strong, lively faith, we would look on suffering and crosses as real benefits and marks of God's love for us. Listen to the words our divine Saviour addressed to Blessed Henry Suso in his great trials: "Affliction is a treasure for sinners, for the penitent, for beginners, for the perfect. It is a greater thing to preserve patience in what is opposed to our liking than to raise the dead to life. The cross is so precious a gift, that wert thou to remain for years prostrate on the ground, beseeching Me to grant thee the grace of suffering, thou wouldst not yet be worthy of obtaining it. It is preferable to burn in a fiery furnace for one hundred years than to be deprived of the smallest cross that I could and would give. Ten souls on earth enjoying the sweets of grace will more easily fall into sin than one soul that patiently endures affliction. Satan is powerless against those who lovingly groan under the cross. Wert thou to speak on God even with the language of the angels, thou wouldst be less holy, less lovable to Me than a soul submissive to My crosses. How many would have been damned, had I not loaded them with trials and crosses! Adversity turns away the heart from things worldly and brings it nearer to heaven; it leads to the glory of the saints, to the triumph of the martyrs, and then those who have been tried by sufferings, sing

to God in the joy of victory a new canticle, which the angels cannot repeat, for they never had to carry the cross."

How many, refusing to use the principal means of practising the necessary patience, fortitude and resignation in their trials, sufferings and adversity, which in many cases are the result of the gratification of their inordinate passions, have recourse to suicide, murder or other foul means to escape detection, or the shame of being discovered or the pains and inconveniences of an incurable disease! How many men and women, unwilling to exercise patience and forbearance with the wife, with the husband of their choice, seek remedy, contrary to the divine law, in divorce and its baneful consequences, or even in suicide or murder, and then follow the course of their base passions! Why do not such persons use the proper remedies against such trials in constant and earnest prayer for patience and strength, in visiting our divine Saviour in the Sacrament of His love and laying before Him their troubles, trials and sufferings, in ceasing to sin, in going to confession and holy Communion, in invoking the Blessed Virgin, the Consoler of the afflicted? Were they to act thus, they would experience what our dear Lord promises to those who go to Him: "Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened (and in trouble) and I will refresh you" (Mat. 11. 28). All who act thus are sure of obtaining what they pray for, and their trials will

become bearable and enable them to do penance for their sins, to lay up treasures in heaven, for ever since Jesus Christ, the Son of God, suffered death for our salvation, His cross imparts value to all our trials and afflictions when properly borne. After passing, as it were, through His compassionate Heart, they have become like relics deserving of our veneration and love.

3. St. Alphonsus earnestly recommends us never to forget asking of God through the merits of Christ and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, these four things necessary to our salvation: the forgiveness of our sins, divine love, the spirit of prayer and final perseverance. We should pray for them every day, morning and evening, whenever we hear Mass, go to confession and holy Communion, visit the Blessed Sacrament. Let us do this faithfully and we shall experience great benefits therefrom.

II. FOR WHOM WE SHOULD PRAY. I. First, we should pray for ourselves, as we have just seen. We must pray unconditionally for our spiritual wants and for the necessities of life; conditionally for what pertains to our temporal welfare.

2. We are bound to pray for the following, whether living or dead: our parents, relatives, benefactors, friends, enemies, all who have injured, pained, persecuted, calumniated us, as our divine Saviour enjoins; all who have recommended themselves or been recommended to us, all for whom we

have promised to pray, or who pray for us; we should pray also for our Holy Mother the Church and her needs, for our Holy Father the Pope, for our Bishop, our Pastor, our Confessor, for the welfare and prosperity of our country and those entrusted with its government, for peace among Christian nations, and for the objects designated to us by our ecclesiastical superiors.

3. We ought to include in our prayers the following objects: zeal for the clergy, strict regular observance for religious, perseverance of the just, fervor for the lukewarm, conversion for sinners, unbelievers, heretics, schismatics and pagans, apostates and persecutors, praying that God may give them light to see the truth and strength to embrace it; for all those who are in their agony and are to die this day. Remember that there are not far from one hundred thousand persons that die daily throughout the world, so many of whom are quite unprepared for their final account to their divine Judge; remember also that the day will come, sooner or later, when you, too, will be in your agony; wherefore do not fail to say daily at least once this prayer for those who are in their agony: "Most merciful Jesus, Lover of souls, I pray Thee by the agony of Thy Sacred Heart and the sorrows of Thy immaculate Mother, wash in Thy blood the sinners of the whole world who are now in their agony and are to die this day. Amen. Heart of Jesus, once in agony, pity the dying."

We ought to pray God to give protection to the innocent, the forsaken and the persecuted; the divine assistance to those who are tempted, or in danger of being led astray, to the children that they may properly be reared and brought up in our holy faith, to those who are in danger of either soul or body, to parents in bringing up their children, help to the poor, relief for the sick, consolation to the afflicted, the spirit of charity to the rich, means of salvation to the abandoned, grace to know and follow their vocation to all who have not chosen their state of life, and fortitude and confidence to the despairing.

4. We ought daily to pray for the souls in purgatory, not only for those mentioned in No. 2 above, but also for the following: the souls that have just entered purgatory, those that have been the longest therein, those that suffer the greatest pains, those nearest to their release and the most abandoned. Although we all hope and expect to go to heaven after our death, we can hardly expect to go there without previously passing a long time in purgatory for our neglect in avoiding little faults, in doing adequate penance for our sins. Oh, how we shall then long for the prayers of the living, that our pains may be diminished and the time we shall have to spend in purgatory be shortened! He who is merciful towards the souls in purgatory during his life, may with right expect that when he shall be of the number of the suffering souls, he will also

experience help and relief from the prayers and good works of charitable souls on earth. For with what measure we measure unto others, it shall be measured unto us again, as our divine Saviour Himself declares (Luke 6. 38). One of the very best means of helping the suffering souls is the *Heroic Act*. They who make it are allowed to apply to these suffering souls all the indulgences they are able to gain. This Act may be made in favor of *all* the souls in purgatory, or only of *one* or *several individual souls*, and is not binding under pain of sin.

· THE HEROIC ACT. O my dearest Lord, Thou seest my sincere and ardent desire to withdraw from the flames of purgatory the souls of my fellow-men and to open to them the gate of heaven, in order to procure fresh glory to Thy adorable Majesty, to testify to Thee, my Sovereign Benefactor, my most heartfelt gratitude, to repair as best I can the offenses I have committed against Thee by my numberless sins, and finally, to render a very pleasing service to Jesus Christ, Thy only-begotten Son, to the Blessed Virgin, His Mother, to St. Joseph and to all the saints. Wherefore, I offer Thee, in behalf of all these suffering souls (or of . . .), not only all my prayers and good works of this day, or all the prayers and good works offered this day for my benefit, but also all those offered by me or for me during my whole life, and all those which will be offered for me after my death. To these

suffering souls I yield and transfer the right I may possess to said prayers and good works, as much as Thou willest and acceptest, and as much as it may contribute to Thy greater glory. Amen.

VARIOUS THOUGHTS AND SAYINGS ON PRAYER

1. Whether we pray vocally or mentally, it is our heart that should speak to God (St. Augustine).

2. Prayer is the food of our soul, for on it depends our preservation in the state of grace and our eternal life in heaven.

3. Prayer protects us from temporal misfortunes, brings down heavenly blessings on our labors and relief and consolation in sufferings and trials; it partly frees us from temptations and partly strengthens us to combat them, and puts the devils to flight. It obtains for us the virtues we need and enables us to practise them.

4. Nothing is sweeter or more cheering than a fervent prayer (St. Bernard). Try it often.

5. What is more glorious or more delightful than to speak to God (Salvian).

6. Thus should we pray: "Lord, if it please Thee, grant me . . ." (Imitation of Christ).

7. When praying for temporal benefits, pray with moderation and timidity, saying to God: "Lord, if it be beneficial to me, grant me . . . but refuse it, if it be hurtful" (St. Augustine).

8. Prayer is to the Christian what weapons are to the soldier (St. Eligius).

9. As moisture is necessary to keep plants from withering, so is prayer necessary to keep Christians from damnation (St. Chrysostom).

10. Prayer is to man what the root is to the tree and the foundation to a building (St. Chrysostom).

11. As water extinguishes fire, so does prayer extinguish the fire of passion (St. Chrysostom).

12. As wax is bleached in the sunlight, so is the soul purified in communing with God, the Eternal Light (St. Augustine).

13. Prayer is a capital drawing interest (St. Augustine).

14. Prayer is a ladder that enables us to ascend to heaven (St. Augustine).

15. Prayer is the key of heaven and of its treasures (St. Augustine).

16. The most favorable time for obtaining the benefits we need is after receiving holy Communion, in which Jesus gives Himself to us and we become most intimately united to Him. Having given Himself to us, there is nothing which He can refuse us, if it promotes or contributes to our salvation; He is ready to grant all we ask. Let us then enliven our faith in His presence within us, and dilate our hearts with a boundless confidence in His goodness and in His love for us, and ask Him with a firm childlike confidence for all the needs of our soul, for strength to overcome temptation, to correct our defects, to enable us to practise meekness, patience, humility and the other virtues of which we

are so deficient, to grant us the forgiveness of our sins, the gift of His love, of prayer and perseverance. Were we to do this with fervor and earnestness after every holy Communion, the good results would soon manifest themselves in the improvement of our conduct.

CHAPTER XI. VOCAL PRAYER AND MENTAL PRAYER

THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF PRAYER, VOCAL AND
MENTAL PRAYER

I. VOCAL PRAYER. By vocal prayer is meant any prayer we recite with our lips, and this is usually done according to some special formula. All Christians habitually recite vocal prayers, such as the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Apostles' Creed, the acts of faith, hope, charity and contrition. The daily Divine Office which the Church prescribes to her Clergy and Religious, also the prayers of Holy Mass are chiefly taken from the Psalms and other parts of Holy Scripture; the prayers used by the priest in the administration of the sacraments and in blessings are also vocal prayers. The Church has, moreover, enriched many vocal prayers with indulgences. They who devoutly recite such prayers derive therefrom a double benefit, the benefit of the pious prayers themselves and the indulgences attached to them. Almost beyond computation are the prayer books published for the faithful, containing beautiful prayers in honor of the Blessed Trinity, of the Blessed Eucharist, of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, of His Passion, of the Blessed Vir-

gin Mary, St. Joseph and other saints and the holy angels, for all occasions and all kinds of wants. Such devotional books, if properly used, are great helps to prayer, especially during the Mass and other divine services, and when going to confession and holy Communion. The majority of men are not able to pray long without being led away from prayer by thoughts foreign to the subject of their prayers; hence the use of a prayer book helps to rivet their attention to the divine service, to the object of their prayers. This is especially the case with those who but seldom pray and with children. These latter, if they do not use a prayer book at Mass and holy Communion, usually act like quite a number of their elders and spend the greater part of the Mass and other divine services in turning around and gazing about the church, and in doing almost anything but praying.

As to vocal prayers, whether recited by heart or read from a prayer book, there is great danger of their being devoid of merit and efficacy, because they are frequently said without attention and hurriedly and with the desire of soon finishing them. This is the case not only with persons who hardly ever pray, but more especially with those who are accustomed to recite many and long vocal prayers. It is not the quantity or the length of the prayers we say that will profit us, but their quality or the manner in which they are said. The pharisees were wont to say many prayers, but our divine Saviour

said of them: "This people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Mark 7. 6). Of some of us Jesus can truly say: "These persons address to Me very many and very long prayers, but their mind, their thoughts are far from Me, for they pray only with their lips, but their mind hardly gives Me a thought, for it is occupied with other things." Such prayers are counterfeit and worthless. Vocal prayers to be good and genuine prayers, should be said, first, with attention, that is, we must think on what we are saying to God and on what graces and benefits we are asking of Him; secondly, since we are speaking to God, it behooves us to pray with due respect, reverence and confidence, and not hurriedly to finish our prayers quickly; and thirdly, we should say them earnestly and fervently, with the intention of doing our part to obtain all that we pray for and should not expect God to do everything for us without our making any effort or exertion on our part, as has been fully explained in previous chapters. Let us bear in mind that one Our Father well recited is better and more effective than a hundred or more recited without attention, or hurriedly and carelessly.

The saying or recitation of the Rosary partakes of the nature of both vocal and mental prayer. The Rosary is composed of the very best vocal prayers, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Apostles' Creed and the Glory be to the Father; and whilst

reciting these excellent prayers, we should reflect on the principal mysteries of our holy religion. If we thus say the Rosary, we may lawfully make use of this devotion even whilst hearing Mass on days of obligation, provided we pay special attention to the principal parts of the Mass, the Offertory, the Consecration and the Communion; and we shall thereby obtain many graces and benefits through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.

II. MENTAL PRAYER. I. Mental prayer is prayer made with or in our mind, not according to formulas, but prompted by what we have previously reflected or meditated on and found to be adapted to our spiritual wants. A general experience proves that many vocal prayers do not bring much, if any, profit to our souls, and this for several reasons. To pray well, and therefore profitably and efficaciously, we must pray not only with attention, humility, confidence, earnestness and perseverance, but we must pray also for those things that are necessary or useful to our salvation. But, as St. Alphonsus declares, comparatively few persons among those who have recourse to prayer, actually know the special needs of their soul, because the majority, for want of due practical reflection, do not know the real wants of their soul, nor the manner in which they should pray for them. To possess this necessary knowledge, there is need of serious reflection or meditation, serious

self-examination and appropriate practical resolutions and fervent petitions to God for grace to keep said resolutions, followed up by genuine efforts to carry out these resolutions. All these requisites are to be found in mental prayer only, in what is usually called making meditation. In mental prayer God enlightens us concerning our duties, our shortcomings, our spiritual wants, concerning the resolutions we should make, and, moreover, through our appropriate prayers and petitions, He imparts to us the necessary grace and strength to keep our resolutions faithfully and to persevere therein. This may seem too complicated to many, but should not discourage them; let them read attentively the following pages, and they will be convinced that every one possessed of a good will can make mental prayer in a more or less perfect degree. Hence let every one take courage and make up his mind to try his best to make mental prayer, and he who earnestly perseveres in trying, will succeed and find mental prayer greatly profitable to his spiritual interests, and a most powerful help to his salvation.

2. Let us suppose that you have a vacant and untilled field, full of various kinds of weeds and with a soil hard and dry. You wish to cultivate it and render it productive. To do so will require both time and plenty of hard work, for you will be obliged not only to cut down those weeds, but to root them all out and to render the ground soft and well fitted to receive seed and bring a good crop to maturity.

All this will require your constant attention and labor, for the sprouting of weeds and the attacks of the weather, the bugs and insects, besides the necessary attention to be bestowed on the growing crop, will keep you very busy. That field represents your soul, which, owing to the consequences of original sin, is like a wild, untilled field, full of weeds and having a hard and dry soil, that is, possessing no relish for things spiritual, and full of evil inclinations and passions, surrounded by all kinds of dangers and almost constantly assailed by the world and the devil. You must struggle almost without intermission against your evil inclinations, and labor earnestly to root them out; unless you do this, you will be liable to become a great sinner, for man is so weak and helpless of himself, that there is no sin, no crime, however great, into which he may not fall, if he is not restrained by the grace and mercy of God. Hence holy Job tells us that "Man's life is a warfare upon earth" (Job 7. 1). How shall we know our evil inclinations and the means to overcome or root them out, how to obtain and use these means, unless through mental prayer? Mental prayer is necessary also to enable us to combat and conquer the external enemies of our soul, that is, the world and the devil, and to discharge our duties towards God, towards ourselves and our fellow-men.

3. It was for the purpose of obtaining this knowledge and of finding out the means of success in this

spiritual warfare that St. Augustine was wont to pray: "Lord, grant that I may know myself, that I may know Thee." This two-fold knowledge is necessary. First, we must know ourselves, who and what we are, our origin, our final destiny, our duties and obligations, our weaknesses, helplessness, our shortcomings, our needs. Men are usually satisfied each with himself, however full of great faults; each one seems to have nothing serious to reproach himself with. And what is the reason of this? Because no one ever makes a serious or thorough self-examination; each one easily sees his neighbor's faults, but is ever blind to his own; each one is always ready to examine the conscience of his neighbor, but never his own, and if he does, it is only superficially in order to contrast his supposed good qualities with the shortcomings of others. Hence few only are those who are aware of their faults, shortcomings, spiritual misery and the needs of their soul. To acquire the necessary self-knowledge, there is need of serious reflection and examination of conscience concerning our thoughts, words and actions; we should try to see ourselves as we are, as others see us, in order to find out our weaknesses. They who neglect doing this, will hardly be aware of their special needs. For instance, a man who is puffed up with pride usually does not acknowledge it and will not pray for and strive to acquire humility, without which he cannot be saved. A man who is very irritable and addicted to impatience, will pray

for many other things, but will never think of the necessity he is under of praying for patience and making serious efforts to overcome that dangerous fault. A miser, a gossip, a backbiter, a mean, selfish man, will not earnestly pray for grace to overcome his ruling passion or do all in his power to root it out. Such persons do not seriously study themselves before God, and therefore in their prayers they never think of praying for what they need the most, in order to overcome their pet and most dangerous fault; but they usually pray for what is neither necessary nor useful to their salvation; or, if they do pray for it, they are not disposed to do, on their part, what is necessary to secure the success of their prayers.

4. In order to know ourselves, we have also to know our relation, our duties towards God and what is required to fulfil them. God is our Creator, our Lord, our Sovereign, infinitely perfect, infinitely powerful, holy, wise, good, just and merciful. He possesses boundless authority over us, for we belong wholly to Him. We should know what He has done for us, how much He loves us, how we absolutely depend on Him for all we have and all we are, the fearful malice of grievous sin, the frightful punishment it deserves, and be well penetrated with the eternal truths, our final destiny and the means of securing it, death, judgment, the eternal rewards and punishments. All this we should not only know, but be so intimately penetrated therewith, that such

knowledge should become the rule and guide of our conduct. These all-important matters, the truths of faith are seen, not with our corporal eyes, but with those of our mind and can be properly contemplated and examined and become our guide only by means of mental prayer, by means of practical meditations. The man who does not reflect, lives without knowing whither he is going and how he will end; hence he runs a great risk of losing his soul, for he gives but little heed to the truths and means that will insure his salvation. How can we know God and His infinite perfections and His boundless love and benefits towards us, if we do not seriously reflect on them? How can we appreciate the importance of salvation, the malice of sin, the value of divine grace, the necessity of prayer to fulfil our duties, if we fail to reflect seriously and practically on these truths? A person that does not make mental prayer, that is, does not practically reflect on spiritual subjects, is cold and indifferent towards God, lacks uprightness of intention, and usually acquits himself carelessly of his spiritual duties, for he is not accustomed to perform them with a lively sense of the presence of God. He is very much like an ordinary workman, who is usually remiss, careless and slothful when his overseer is out of sight. Can this be otherwise? Without the practice of mental prayer our soul greatly resembles a parched garden, in which the flowers fade and fall, the plants wither, and everything looks wretched

and barren. He who fails to devote frequently, if not daily, some time to serious reflection and self-examination, dries up the source of pious and salutary thoughts, of the spiritual unction, imparting relish for the works of salvation, and, consequently, fails to receive the abundant graces giving life, energy and fervor to his mind and will. Such a one has reason to address to himself these words of the psalmist: "My heart is withered, because I forgot to eat my bread" (Ps. 101, 5), that is, because I failed to nourish my soul with the bread of holy meditation and prayer. In short, he who does not make mental prayer, becomes dissipated in mind, seldom thinks of God and usually performs his devotions through mere custom and with but little fruit at most. And what virtues can we acquire in this way? Faith? But ardent faith requires the nourishment of both reflection and petitions. Humility? But how can we become humble without studying ourselves and our perverse inclinations and our helplessness? And if we do not truly know ourselves, how can we correct our defects? And moreover, without serious practical reflection our charity, our patience, our obedience will lack the supernatural sap, which raises our works to God, and our virtues will be only apparent rather than real and solid, merely natural instead of supernatural, as they should be, in order to please God and deserve heavenly reward and secure our salvation. Hence Gerson,

celebrated for both his great learning and piety, does not hesitate to say that "he who does not meditate, that is, does not seriously and practically reflect on the matters that concern his salvation, cannot, without a miracle, lead a truly Christian life."

5. Experience, whilst showing us that the neglect of serious reflection on the concerns of salvation, is the reason why so many neglect their religious duties and go astray into paths more or less sinful, and remain therein for many years wholly regardless of their salvation, also shows us the effect of serious reflection, self-examination and prayer in so many sinners, even great and obdurate sinners, who are sincerely and thoroughly converted during missions, retreats and Lenten courses. How does this happen? Such sinners, who hitherto had never reflected on the wants of their soul and its sad state, are aroused by sermons and prayers to serious thought, self-examination and almost compelled to make appropriate resolutions to give up sin, to confess their iniquities and earnestly to beseech God for mercy and strength to amend their life. They had previously, for want of serious reflections and self-examinations, gone astray, and now urged on by God's grace they have reflected seriously, examined their conscience and returned to God and to the path of duty and salvation! If, after their conversion, they continue frequently to reflect seriously on the principal truths or mysteries of religion, on the importance of salvation, renew and practise their

good resolutions and pray earnestly for the grace to remain faithful, they will persevere; but if they grow remiss therein, or even fail altogether in the use of these means, they will surely relapse. God, out of mercy, sends to the sinner, at least now and then, remorse or qualms of conscience, in order to induce him to repent; if the sinner is faithful to this remorse and begins seriously to reflect on his wickedness, he will soon proceed to examine his conscience and become aware of the sad state and danger of his soul; if he perseveres in this, he will pray fervently and receive all the graces he needs for his conversion and amendment. And this happy change is the result of his practice of mental prayer.

6. WHAT ST. ALPHONSUS TEACHES ON MENTAL PRAYER. St. Alphonsus, declared Doctor of the Church on account of his many learned works, in which the Church found nothing deserving of blame, wrote among others the best, the most practical book on Prayer, and it was his ardent desire to supply, had it been in his power, every man on earth with a copy, on account of the absolute necessity of the prayer of petition for the graces of salvation. Let us now consider the principal points of his teaching on mental prayer. "Prayer," he says, "is absolutely necessary for our salvation, and mental prayer is necessary to pray well. Without mental prayer we can have no supernatural light concerning God, the eternal truths, the mysteries of faith, the virtues and vices, the vanity of earthly goods,

honors and pleasures, and the grandeur and excellence of the spiritual and heavenly goods. Without it we cannot acquire the necessary knowledge of ourselves, our misery, our helplessness, nor can we discover our faults or the means of avoiding and correcting them. Hence we cannot pray with sufficient earnestness, humility, confidence and perseverance for light and strength to avoid sin and perform our duties, or to overcome temptations or to subdue our passions, unless we practise mental prayer. 'The earth is laid waste, because there is no one that thinketh in his heart' (Jer. 12. 11). Mental prayer excites and increases our faith and hope in God, enlightens us, moves our heart to love God, and strengthens our will in the path of duty, for God becomes therein our teacher: 'Blessed is the man, whom Thou, O Lord, shalt instruct' (Ps. 93. 12). Mental prayer renders us watchful over ourselves, mistrustful of self and full of confidence in God. He who daily makes mental prayer, discovers the wants of his soul, and learns how to pray to God to grant them. Moreover, like a fiery furnace, it heats and softens the cold and hard iron of our heart, and renders it malleable in the hands of God. He who faithfully practises mental prayer and perseveres in it cannot be lost, for mortal sin and mental prayer cannot abide together. A sinner who begins to make mental prayer will soon be compelled either to give up sin altogether, or to cease making mental prayer; and, however deeply rooted his habits may

be, if he persists in this holy exercise, it will soon enable him to make all the sacrifices necessary to give up the habit of sin entirely. In mental prayer the soul is filled with holy thoughts, holy affections, desires and resolutions and with divine love and thereby strengthened to give up every evil habit and sacrifice all her passions."

7. HOW TO MAKE MENTAL PRAYER. One of the best preparations for mental prayer is the practice of frequently raising our mind and heart to God during the day by means of ejaculatory prayers or of renewing our good intention. This will be a great help for keeping recollected and making petitions during this holy exercise. When about to begin mental prayer let us place ourselves in as lively a manner as possible in the presence of God with whom we are to converse. Then let us pray to the Holy Ghost to enlighten us, that we may learn our obligations, discover our shortcomings and the means of correcting them and to give us grace and strength to make and keep appropriate resolutions. Let us then add a Hail Mary to the Blessed Virgin Mary and a brief request to our guardian angel for their help in making our mental prayer profitable to our soul. We then read the subject of the mental prayer from a book or recall some pious thoughts drawn from the sight of the crucifix or some other holy object, and *seriously* reflect thereon. What we do not seriously reflect on makes but a slight impression which is easily effaced from our mind and does

not excite us to any serious or earnest efforts, and cannot therefore produce fruit in us. Our reflections must be practical, that is, not only be on the subject chosen, but be applied to ourselves in connection with the subject, otherwise they would be a mere study without connection with mental prayer, without any bearing on our spiritual wants. Wherefore we must apply to ourselves, to our conduct the reflections we make in mental prayer. We can do this by asking ourselves this question: "What profit can I derive from this subject?" or, "How can I apply this to myself?" A few moments' reflection will indicate the desired answer. For instance, you have read the following passage: "As an inducement to practise patience in trials consider Jesus Christ hanging on the cross. All around Him insulted Him, mocked Him and His pains. He bore all in silence. A true Christian strives to imitate Him in His patience. 'For,' says St. Peter (I 2. 21-23), 'unto this you are called; because also Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow His steps. He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth; when He was reviled, He did not revile.'" You choose this passage as your practical lesson and examine how you have in the past taken Jesus Christ as your Model in the practice of patience, and find out how you have in several ways failed in imitating the Saviour's patience; this will induce you to make a sincere act of contrition. A few moments of further re-

flection will cause you to discover how the imitation of the patience of Jesus will enable you to avoid sin, to keep peace with your neighbor, and to gain merit for heaven, and then you will easily feel inspired to firmly resolve with God's grace to bear in patience and silence all injuries, contempt and contradictions from your neighbor, especially from those persons who are wont to try your patience. Now is the time to address a number of fervent petitions to God to bless your resolution and to give you the necessary strength and grace to keep it faithfully. Add now short aspirations of divine love, of confidence in God, and some invocations of the Blessed Virgin and the saints for their help in carrying out your resolution. Then gather from the reflections you have made the thought that impressed you the most, so as to be able to recall it now and then during the day, and have it as a reminder of your resolution. You may now conclude your mental prayer by reciting in honor of the Blessed Virgin the Hail, holy Queen for the grace of perseverance and an Our Father and a Hail Mary for the conversion of sinners, or for some other object.

You should bear well in mind that in mental prayer your subject, your reflections, your application thereof to yourself, your self-examination, your resolution, your petitions must be practically and intimately connected together as *one whole*, and that it behooves you at once to proceed to carry out your resolution. This entails on your part special watch-

ing over yourself, your thoughts and your words, and to be on your guard when you are about to meet with persons or occasions that have previously caused you to commit faults opposed to your present resolution. Remember that you are weak and liable to break your resolution, that you need God's help to enable you to keep it, and that it behooves you to pray for His help, but that you cannot expect His help unless you have the good and earnest will to do your share, to exert yourself and make even sacrifices in order to remain faithful to your resolution.

8. FREQUENT PIOUS READING is a great help to making mental prayer well. We should, therefore, read the "Lives of the Saints," books on the truths and mysteries of our holy religion, on the duties and virtues of a true Christian, on the eternal truths, and especially the holy Gospels. By such reading we can in the course of time not only acquire a relish for spiritual things, but also gather an abundance of good and holy thoughts which will prove a great help to facilitate our mental prayer and increase its fruits. Spiritual reading is spiritual food for the mind. But to be benefited by it, we should imitate those who take their corporal nourishment properly. They eat slowly, not greedily; moderately, not excessively; they masticate it well and swallow it. In like manner, we should make spiritual reading slowly and attentively, not through curiosity; not too many books; we should carefully reflect on

what we read, apply the matter to ourselves, to our conduct, and make it our own by putting it into practice. By reading spiritual books in this manner, and interspersing their reading with pious reflections, a little self-examination and a good resolution with a few brief petitions for divine grace to practise it, beginners will learn gradually how to make mental prayer. The most practical and best teachers of mental prayer are the works of St. Alphonsus, especially those on the Passion and on the Incarnation of our divine Saviour, and the book entitled "Preparation for Death." These books will inspire you with a horror of sin and with the most tender love for Jesus and Mary and with a relish for prayer. The same may be said of Bronchain's Meditations for every day in the year.

The very best subject for mental prayer is the Passion of Jesus Christ. St. Paul urges us to meditate thereon, saying: "Looking on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who, having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame . . . Think diligently upon Him that endured such opposition from sinners against Himself" (Hebr. 12. 2, 3). We Catholics should never let a day pass without recalling the love of the Son of God for us in suffering the ignominy and torments of His passion in order to save us. "As for myself," says St. Alphonsus, who prescribed to the members of his Congregation a daily meditation on the passion, and wrote such beautiful and touching medita-

tions thereon, "I can never be satiated with meditating on the passion. In this subject I find everything, for it teaches us every virtue." St. Augustine declares that there is nothing more profitable to us, nothing more reliable for leading us to eternal salvation, than to reflect daily on the torments Jesus Christ endured for our sake. "O God," exclaims St. Alphonsus, "can he who has faith reflect seriously on the sufferings and ignominies Jesus Christ endured for us, and not burn with love for Him and take the firm resolution to avoid sin and save his soul, so as not to prove ungrateful to so loving a God!" When reflecting on the passion, we seem to hear a mysterious voice saying to us: "Behold how much I have loved thee!" In fact, our sweet Saviour suffered such great torments in order to induce us to think on them; and this we cannot do without feeling urged by His boundless love for us, wretched sinners, to love Him ardently in return. Why are the souls really enamored of Jesus Christ, comparatively few? Because not very many reflect seriously on the torments and death He endured for mankind. Those, however, who meditate on them earnestly, cannot but ardently love Jesus who suffered such great torments in order to be loved by them. Hence St. Paul proclaimed: "I judged not myself to know anything among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (I Cor. 2. 2). And, in fact, whence can we more easily draw the science

of the saints, which consists in knowing how to love God, than from Jesus crucified? To a certain holy person our divine Saviour Himself revealed that meditation on His passion is the most effective means of acquiring perfect divine love. According to both St. Bonaventure and St. Alphonsus, meditation on the passion of Christ is the best, the easiest and quickest means of attaining salvation and perfection. What a touching and eloquent spectacle to behold the Man-God, innocent and holy, infinitely perfect, enduring all kinds of torments and ignominy, as if He were the most vile and perverse of mankind. Jesus Christ crucified should be our love, our treasure, our life. Our hearts should remain constantly attached to His sacred feet, so that we may be able to say with St. Paul: "With Christ I am nailed to the cross; and I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me. And that I live now in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself for me" (Gal. 2. 19, 20). Let us often repeat this beautiful prayer of St. Augustine: "O my most loving Saviour, deign to engrave deeply in my heart Thy sacred wounds, that I may always read therein Thy pains and Thy love; Thy pains, that I may patiently bear every pain for Thy sake; Thy love, that I may despise every other love, so that I may love Thee only." Our divine Saviour one day said to the saintly Mother Agnes of Lan-

geac: "I am love itself, as I have proved by My passion. Oh! blessed are those who meditate thereon!"

N. B. To all that had been said on mental prayer are here added, as models of easy and practical meditations a few meditations from Father Bronchain's excellent "Meditations for every day in the year."

CHAPTER XII. SELECTIONS FROM FATHER BRONCHAIN'S MEDITATIONS

I. THE PRESENCE OF GOD

"I set the Lord always in my sight" (Ps. 15. 8).

I. MOTIVES AND MEANS OF REMEMBERING GOD.
There is not a moment in which God does not think of us and confer benefits on us. As He Himself declares, He loves and guards our soul as the apple of His eye (Deut. 32. 10). Without ceasing He imparts to us existence and life, preserves our reason and our faith, and surrounds us with means of salvation. Desiring to be always with us, He establishes His abode within us, and always cares for us with fatherly solicitude. How can we ever forget God who so greatly loves us? We ought to think of Him every time we draw breath. "I set the Lord always in my sight."

This remembrance of Him will easily become habitual with us, if we endeavor to impress it on our mind, for it will attach to God not only our mind and our will, but also our imagination, our feelings, our affections, and we shall then find no difficulty in thinking of God, in speaking to Him from our very heart. Let us, then, through prayer,

seek to obtain this tender devotion of being mindful of Him, and lovingly communing with Him, and we shall "taste and see that the Lord is sweet" (Ps. 33. 9).

We should, moreover, endeavor to render this exercise of the divine presence practical and efficacious. God is in our heart as He is in heaven with His infinite power, wisdom, goodness, justice, veracity and holiness. What a powerful motive to adore Him within us, to fear Him with a truly childlike fear, to love Him, to confide in His mercy, to ask His blessing and help in our wants! Let us, sometimes, say with St. Augustine: "O my God, I will not remove my eyes from Thee, since Thou never removest Thine from me." Grant me the grace to think unceasingly on Thy goodness, to pray to Thee, and to perform, under Thy guidance all the duties Thy holy will imposes on me.

2. FRUITS OF THE EXERCISE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD. Respect should be the first effect of the thought that the Divine Majesty dwells in us and is present at all our thoughts and actions. All earthly monarchs with their brilliant courts, all the Pontiffs of the Church amid the most solemn and grand Ceremonial of the Church, and even the immense multitude of the angelic choirs, can hardly give us a faint idea of the grandeurs of God. And it is the Divine Creator Himself, who permanently abides within us, and we live under His very eyes. How capable is such a thought of inspiring us with

a childlike fear, and of making us assiduous adorers of the infinite Holiness dwelling in our soul! "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long" (Prov. 23. 17).

Since God is in us, with all the riches of His goodness, especially in favor of those who invoke Him, we should join confidence to respect in the worship we owe Him. Being present in us to impart His favors to us, He bestows them preferably on those who pray to Him and trust in His mercy. Let us, then, say to Him with David: "It is good to place my hope in the Lord" (Ps. 72. 28).

Let us especially strive to love Him. Since, on account of His infinite perfections, He is infinitely lovable in Himself, He loves us with unspeakable tenderness and proves it by His constant benefits. Being, as it were, immersed in Him as in a furnace of love, we are constantly the object of His care, even in the details of our life, for, as Jesus Himself tells us, not a hair falls from our head without His permission. Not content with having created, redeemed and sanctified us, and nourished us with the flesh of His Divine Son, He cares for us, from the cradle to the grave, with an ever-watchful and invincibly constant love. How then can we remain cold and indifferent towards such flames of divine love?

O my God, Sovereign Majesty, I adore Thee present in my heart. I surrender myself wholly to Thy infinite wisdom, which disposes everything for

my greatest good. Through the merits of Jesus and Mary, give me the grace, first, of a lively faith in Thy divine presence and in the workings of Thy Providence in me, and secondly, that of a special care to adore Thee, to pray to Thee, to love Thee always, and to direct towards Thee all my intentions and all my desires.

2. THE GIFT OF GOD

“If thou knewest the gift of God” (John 4. 10).

1. THE GIFT OF GOD OF WHICH JESUS SPOKE. “Oh, if you only knew the gift of God,” says our divine Saviour to us as He did to the Samaritan woman. “If, O redeemed soul, thou knewest how much beauty, grandeur and nobility there is in the gift I bring thee from My Father, in the gift that restores the life lost by sin, and is called sanctifying grace! This gift effaces original sin in thee, and likewise the shameful stains of thy iniquities, were they even as numerous as the grains of sand on the sea-shore, and as horrible as the crimes of the greatest criminals! It restores to thee the original beauty of the human soul before the fall. It sanctifies thee as it did Adam, makes thee as pleasing as he was to the heavenly court and to the thrice Holy God. It makes thee an adopted child of the heavenly Father, as I am His Son by nature.”

“And what follows from this? Thou sharest with Me rights that are ever sacred; My riches, My

merits are thine; My doctrine, My spirit, My sentiments, My Heart, My very life are imparted to thee, so that thou mayst say with St. Paul: 'I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me' (Gal. 3. 20). Moreover, the Holy Ghost who hovered over Me from My very Incarnation, as over the flower of Jesse, deigns to come in thee, notwithstanding thy past defilement, so as really to dwell in thee with God the Father and God the Son."

"Thus thou art enriched with virtues and gifts more precious than the universe; thou art formed after My image and likeness by the Divine Paraclete Himself, that thou mayst one day be admitted to participate in My glory. O redeemed soul, if thou knewest the value of this gift of grace, which so transforms thee, thou wouldst not cease to increase it by thy fervor and fidelity."

O Jesus, Thy words move me. Hitherto I have not sufficiently appreciated the value and happiness of Thy grace. Just as mortal sin is an immense evil, so is Thy friendship an excellent good surpassing all others. In me it is the source of peace, the principle of virtue, and the condition of merit. I will, therefore, preserve it at every cost by fleeing danger, by frequent prayer and the reception of the sacraments.

2. WHO IS JESUS, AND WHAT DOES HE THIRST AFTER? Oh, "if thou knewest," said Jesus to the Samaritan woman, "who is He that saith to thee, give Me to drink." "O soul redeemed by My blood,

if thou knewest what I am in thy regard, I who am asking thee without ceasing: give Me thy heart, thy will, thy love! To gain thy love, what have I not done? Before time began, when the earth had not yet sprung into existence, when even the heavenly spirits were not yet created, I already loved thee; and I loved thee disinterestedly, out of mere goodness, favoring thee through all generations among the millions I intended to create."

"I saw thee beforehand guilty of so many sins, forgetful of My benefits, so ungratefully resisting My graces, and going so far as even to renew all the torments of My passion! And notwithstanding all this, I loved, I tenderly cherished thee as a poor stray sheep which I wished to bring back to the fold of My grace. And how much has not this cost Me? I descended from the throne of My greatness, so far as to take the form of a slave, and to become, as it were, 'a worm, the reproach of men and the outcast of the people' (Ps. 21. 7). Dost thou now understand how much I have loved thee?"

O Jesus, only too well do I understand my ingratitude and perfidy in Thy regard. Thou gavest me existence without any merit on my part, and I have so often abused it to offend Thee. In baptism I received such precious gifts from Thy bounty; but, alas! what use did I make of them? Hardly had I attained the age of reason, than like the prodigal son, I spent all these gifts to gratify my corrupt inclinations. And yet, O Lord, Thy love for me

was not discouraged; Thou didst always thirst for my love. After coming down from heaven, Thou didst labor, endure hardships and fatigue, and now, as from Jacob's well, Thou speakest to me without ceasing from the adorable Eucharist, saying: "Oh, if thou only knewest who it is that says to thee, give Me to drink, give Me thy heart, thy will, thy love!"

O my Creator and Saviour, the most tender friend of my soul, how can I offer Thee further resistance? I consecrate to Thee my mind, which shall henceforth always think on Thee; I give Thee my whole heart, its desires and its affections. Strengthen my resolution to be unreservedly Thine under the protection of Thy Mother, who is also mine.

3. JESUS SUFFERING

"Think diligently upon Him, . . . that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds" (Hebr. 12, 3).

I. MOTIVES FOR MEDITATING ON THE PASSION. From the beginning of the world God seems to invite and urge mankind never to forget their Redeemer. He promised Him to our first parents as the Repairer of their ruin. From age to age He recalls His remembrance by means of sacrifices, figures and prophecies. The prophet Isaias so clearly described the torments of His Passion, that he might be taken for an evangelist. Wherefore, if already before the Redeemer's birth the sufferings of the future Messiah were the object of the

consideration of the Jews, how much more should not we Christians, after the Redemption, lovingly occupy ourselves with the sufferings that have regenerated us!

The Church every year devotes Lent, and especially the last fortnight of that holy season, to reminding us of the moving scenes of the Passion. With what touching accents from Septuagesima Sunday to Easter she speaks to us in her Offices of the Saviour's prayer in the garden of olives, of His crowning with thorns, of His adorable wounds and His infinitely precious blood! Even the burial of her divine Spouse is not forgotten. Each day renews their reality in the Sacrifice of our altars, in which the Victim of Calvary immolates Himself mystically for us.

The crosses we behold in our churches, on their spires, and on the graves in the cemeteries, seem to say to us: "Think on your Saviour." We so often sign ourselves with this august sign of our Redemption; do we always do it with respect, attention and profit? Whenever at home or elsewhere our eyes meet the image of the crucifix, do we then say to ourselves: "Behold how much my God has loved me?"

O Jesus, Jesus suffering and dying for my soul, how can I ever forget Thee? Thou hast preserved me from hell and permitted me to aspire to heaven; Thou art my secure refuge against my enemies. Thy wounds are balsam to my sores, and Thy blood,

a restoring and comforting beverage. Grant me the grace often devoutly to make the Way of the Cross, to recite the sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary, and to draw therefrom the most lively sentiments of repentance for my sins, of confidence in Thy merits and of resignation in all the trials of life.

2. THE LESSONS OF THE PASSION. The mystery of Jesus' suffering facilitates our belief in all the other mysteries. What can impart to us better than a crucified God a higher idea of the ineffable perfections of the three Divine Persons; of the Father, whose justice, greatness and holiness required such a reparation for our sins; of the Son, whose wisdom and goodness so wonderfully shines forth in the work of our reparation, of the Holy Ghost, who so lovingly and generously applies to our souls the inexhaustible riches of Christ's Passion? The eternity of hell and the eternity of heaven are most evident consequences of the Saviour's sufferings and death. For, as St. Bernard says, the eternal, infinite Divine Word would never have assumed such cruel torments, had there not been question of either an irremediable misfortune or an endless happiness for us.

And how well does the crucifixion of a God-Man set forth the importance of salvation, the inestimable value of divine grace, the nobility of our soul and the sublimity of our destiny! The malice of sin is proclaimed by each of the Saviour's wounds,

and there is not a single truth or mystery in religion to which the death of Jesus does not impart new vigor and more vivid brightness.

O dolorous Passion, luminous beacon! What a splendor thou sheddest amid the darkness of our exile! Through thee we know our Saviour and His teaching. His most austere maxims, the pardon of injuries, the love of contempt, self-denial, are all written in bloody characters by the thorns and nails which cause Him so much suffering. Where else are more clearly taught the eight beatitudes of the sermon on the mount? Here our Saviour puts them into practice, so as to add the alluring impulse of His example to His divinely infallible word.

Moreover, what sublime virtues does He not practise amid so much anguish! At Gethsemane He prays, He is resigned, He confides in His heavenly Father, notwithstanding the sadness and weariness that overwhelm Him. Before His judges He remains silent, or gives testimony to the truth, according to the designs of the divine Wisdom; He practises humility, meekness, patience and charity amid the most cruel torments. Even on the cross He prays, forgives His enemies and dies in obedience to God, out of love for men.

O Jesus, teach me to imitate the virtues Thou practisest in Thy sufferings, first, humility which induced Thee to accept in silence contempt, mockery and insults; secondly, the spirit of prayer, which

caused Thee to pray in spite of Thy repugnance and sorrow ; and thirdly, patience and charity which enabled Thee to embrace the cross with courage and with the intention of glorifying Thy heavenly Father and saving our souls.

4. JESUS PRAYING IN THE GARDEN OF OLIVES

Jesus praying in the garden of olives teaches us how we should pray.

1. JESUS PRAYS WITH ATTENTION AND HUMILITY. When they had come to the garden of olives, Jesus said to His disciples: " Sit you here, till I go yonder and pray " (Mat. 26. 36). He then retired further in order to converse with His heavenly Father. By this He teaches us to recollect ourselves when we are about to converse with God, for it is not becoming that we should mingle profane thoughts with those of God and the salvation of our soul. Without recollection our mind is wanting in the respect the creature owes to its Creator, and our heart is deprived of the ardent desires requisite for a good meditation and an efficacious prayer. Wherefore, before addressing our Lord let us banish from our imagination, our memory and our mind all images foreign to holy things, all remembrance of the world, all profane thoughts; let us keep our soul perfectly calm, as is required by the important matters we are to treat about with the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth.

Having retired apart, Jesus " fell upon His face

praying" (Mat. 26. 39), thereby giving us the example of the profound humility that ought to accompany all our prayers. What are we in comparison to our Creator? We are as grains of sand and imperceptible atoms that came out of nothing; we are even more vile still, for we are sinners deserving of endless punishment. How then should we implore the Almighty's favor? Jesus humbles Himself under the weight of our iniquities, although He is infinitely great in Himself. What, then, should be our confusion, we who are mere abject creatures, when, laden with our own sins, we crave mercy from the divine Majesty outraged by our malice!

If we have the same dispositions as Jesus, our prayers will be cries of our repentant heart which God will not despise. David cried out to the Lord out of the depths of his misery, in all humility, and found therein a motive of confidence, saying: "Lord, hear my voice" (Ps. 129. 1), my prayer, which is so capable of moving Thee, for it proceeds from a heart intimately persuaded of its unworthiness.

O my God, inspire me with similar sentiments of humility, so that they may keep me recollected in Thy presence, and banish from my heart all self-esteem, all vain complacency in my deeds and in the affections of others, these fertile sources of pride and distractions. Give me the grace to begin all my meditations with acts of self-abasement before Thee, so that I may draw to myself Thy light and

Thy favors, and especially the gift of a profound recollection and an humble devotion.

2. JESUS PRAYS WITH CONFIDENCE AND PERSEVERANCE. Being prostrate on the ground, Jesus begins His prayer: "My Father" (Mat. 26. 39). This expression of love shows the filial confidence which overflowed the Saviour's heart. Humility is no hindrance to confidence, but purifies it of all imperfection and perfects it by teaching us to place our hope in God alone. It is, in fact, in order to trust in God only, that we cease to rely on ourselves. To Him we acknowledge, in all truth, our ignorance, our weakness, our misery, our poverty, so as to compel Him by virtue of His very promises to open to us the treasures of His wisdom, power and goodness. The more we humble ourselves, the greater also is our claim and right to hope in His mercy, which is the asylum of all who own their misery and helplessness. And yet how often do we hesitate to place our trust in God, especially when we ask benefits of Him!

Notwithstanding the anguish, the repugnance and sadness that so strongly assail Him, Jesus continues His prayer and even prolongs it during His agony, repeating always the same words (Luke 22. 43). O Jesus, how greatly does Thy example condemn our sloth! We pray only when we feel like it, when consolation abounds, but so soon as we find prayer difficult and our heart feels indisposed, we get disheartened and cease praying. Our devotion does

not proceed from the devotedness of our will seeking solely God's pleasure, but is merely a selfishness preferring its own satisfaction to real virtue.

O my most amiable Redeemer, I am resolved to correct my ways and henceforth to pray, first, because it is my duty, with the intention of offering due homage to God, of thanking Him for all His benefits, and of drawing down His mercies and graces upon my soul and upon all for whom I am bound to pray; and secondly, I will pray at all times, in all places, on all occasions, and always with the requisite dispositions. Mary, my loving Mother, help me to understand that prayer is as necessary for my spiritual life as breathing for my physical life. Obtain for me the grace to pray without ceasing, to pray as Jesus prayed, that is, with attention, humility, confidence and perseverance. "Being in an agony, He prayed the longer" (Luke 22. 43).

5. EFFECTS OF THE PASSION

"Being justified in His blood, we shall be saved" (Rom. 5. 9).

1. THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST CLOSES HELL AND OPENS HEAVEN TO US. To appreciate the immense favor our divine Redeemer has done us by preserving us from hell, we should know in what the eternal punishments consist. St. Teresa, to whom they were revealed, assures us that all that is said about them by preachers and writers is as

nothing. The most terrible fire in this world, she says, is as a mere painting of fire compared to the furnace in which the reprobates are punished. They feel as if they were hacked to pieces, and devoid of hope and alleviation. In that frightful place a pestilential atmosphere causes continual suffocation; both the body and the soul are a prey to intolerable pains, and what completes the misery, is that they are endless and without relief. "Ten years have now passed since this vision," she writes, "and I am still so terrified at its remembrance that I shudder with fright." O Jesus, if Thy sorrowful passion had obtained no other favor for me than to preserve me from such dreadful evils and pains, I should owe Thee an everlasting gratitude.

But our loving Saviour has done us a still greater favor, by opening to us the heavenly Jerusalem, which consists not only in exemption from all pain whatsoever, but also in the assured possession for all eternity of all the joys and delights of which the human heart is capable. So great a happiness is beyond description; it was merited for us by the blood of the Son of God; it is the very happiness of God Himself. How grateful we should be to Jesus for having acquired it for us!

But was it only at a small sacrifice that our generous Redeemer accomplished all this? Did our salvation cost Him only a prayer, a word, a tear shed over us? No; and we should herein admire His incomprehensible devotedness to us, poor sin-

ners. Having no need of us and in spite of our offenses, perfidy, malice and ingratitude, He snatched us from the jaws of hell and opened heaven to us, at the price of thirty-three years of poverty, labor, hardships and sufferings, which ended in the most cruel and humiliating death that ever was. O prodigy of the Almighty's goodness! O perfectly pure and disinterested charity! To save us, vile slaves, the King of glory "emptied Himself" and took our place on the gibbet of ignominy.

O Lord, what return shall I make to Thee for all these benefits? Merely to thank Thee is too little; to love Thee is not yet sufficient; hence the least I should do is to consecrate myself, body and soul, and forever to Thy service. To Thee alone will I direct all my intentions and affections, all my activity at every moment of my life until my last breath.

2. THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST GAVE US THE CHURCH. Not content with having closed hell and opened heaven to us by His sufferings, our divine Saviour wished to secure to us the enjoyment of the goods He had deserved for our salvation. Wherefore, He founded His Church, that Church that was figured by the blood and water which flowed out of His side, when pierced by the soldier's lance. Brought forth by the life-giving death of her Author, this Spouse of Christ will subsist until the end of ages, imparting to every human generation the abundant graces of the Redemption. The infallibility of her visible Head, the Pope, in matters

of faith and morals, the truth of her doctrines preached over the whole earth, the wonderful efficacy of her sacraments, which, like mysterious channels, spreads to the ends of the earth in docile hearts light, hope and life; all these precious means render salvation easy to men of good will, especially if they join thereto the reading of pious books, the meditation of the revealed truths, and together with earnest and persevering prayer, which our Saviour has made all-powerful, by endowing it with His merits and promises.

Who can fail to admire, how the Church by the blood of Jesus, her Spouse, begets her children by baptism, strengthens them in faith by confirmation, heals them of their spiritual diseases by penance, feeds and fortifies them in the Sacrament of our altars? How great her solicitude to preserve for men sound doctrine, to keep them from danger, to support them on the way to eternal life, to comfort them at their last hour and to introduce them into the eternal Kingdom! Everywhere and to every one she offers divine grace; to the sinner she opens the way of returning to God, and there is no sinner so hopeless that does not find in her a truly maternal love ever ready to receive kindly a repentant heart.

How often are we not the objects of her maternal kindness! Sharing her goods with us, she enables us to participate in her adorable Sacrifice, absolves us from sin in the sacred tribunal, refreshes us in the Eucharistic Banquet, wherein we receive the

spotless Lamb immolated for us on the cross.

O Jesus, my Redeemer, it will not be Thy fault, nor that of Thy Church, if I am lost in spite of Thy infinite merits. Preserve me henceforth from negligence and routine in my exercises of piety, lest, being rendered inefficacious by my lukewarmness, they no longer impart to me the vivifying sap of grace, which gives me life, and keeps up in me the requisite zeal for my salvation. Under the protection of Thy holy Mother Mary, I resolve, first, to arouse my fervor by the consideration of my spiritual indigence and the value of the goods acquired by Thy Passion, and secondly, to derive profit from the sacraments by preparing carefully for their reception by means of habitual recollection, frequent prayer and interior acts of faith, confidence and love.

6. THE FRUITS OF THE REDEMPTION

“When Jesus had taken the vinegar, He said: It is consummated” (John 19. 30).

1. JESUS SUFFERING MAKES SATISFACTION FOR US. Our Divine Saviour in His Passion opened to us an abundant source of satisfaction, which enables us to appease God’s infinite justice. “To make satisfaction for an offense,” says St. Thomas, “is to restore to the offended person as much or more honor than was taken away from him, and excite in him as much or more love than the offense provoked hatred or repulsion in him.” But it was

utterly impossible for any creature, however exalted, to pay the debt of sin and perform the office of reconciliation with God. Because there was question of making reparation to God for the glory of which sin robbed Him by transgressing His commandments, rejecting His benefits, outraging His goodness and shamefully despising His wisdom, power and justice. And who but a God-Man could have accomplished this?

Jesus Christ not only effected this, but even gave His heavenly Father a compensation far exceeding our offenses. This He fulfilled by the immensity of His love, the dignity of His Person, the universality of His Passion and the greatness of His sufferings. First, as to His love; who can comprehend it? It imparted to the least of His prayers, of His tears and aspirations infinite excellence. Secondly, the dignity of His Person and of His self-sacrifice is not less admirable, for it rendered to God infinitely more glory than original sin had despoiled Him of. Thirdly, His sufferings, so manifold, so intense, so efficacious, in their turn, superabundantly repaired the injury done to the Creator by His ungrateful creatures.

Adam sinned through pride and we together in him, for wishing, like Lucifer, to equal the Most High. What does Jesus do to heal us? He abases Himself to the lowest rank and suffers Himself to be treated as the most abject of criminals. Adam rebels, refusing to obey God; and, alas! how often

have not we imitated him? But in His Passion He gives us the example of the most perfect submission, by making obedience His food, as it were (John 4. 34), His breathing, His very life. The first man, and we with him, sinned through sensuality, preferring sensual gratification to the divine will. But our Blessed Redeemer expiates our fault by a life of poverty and hardship, and finally by a cruel death, more painful than that of the martyrs.

O Jesus, I unite myself to the complete satisfaction Thou offerest for me on Calvary and on our altars, and, in order the more fully to participate therein, I implore from Thee the following graces: first, an intense sorrow for my sins and the strength to combat their cause in my perverse inclinations; and secondly, courage to bear my daily cross and the trials connected with the duties of my state. Such, O Jesus, is the best penance I can offer to the eternal Father in union with Thine in Thy dolorous Passion.

2. JESUS SUFFERING MERITS FOR US. Our Divine Saviour, by His death, merited not only for Himself but also for the whole Church, of which He is the Head and we are the members, because His infinite dignity, His boundless charity imparted to all He did and suffered such a merit of divine grace and incomprehensible glory, which would suffice to save an infinity of worlds far more vast than ours, Such is the magnificent patrimony He left us after His death, from which we may, at every moment,

draw enough to amass a treasure, a capital of divine grace which will enable us one day to merit the eternal heritage.

But how shall we secure a share in these noble and desirable riches? Can we do so by merely expecting them from the divine bounty without making any efforts on our part? Far from this; the Redemption is a remedy which we must apply to ourselves; it is a work begun in us by the Incarnate Word, which it behooves us to complete with Him, for St. Paul says that we "must fill up those things which are wanting to the sufferings of Christ" (Col. 1. 21).

As a remedy, the Saviour's cross opens to us the vivifying fountains of the sacraments, especially those of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. Through their worthy reception we can close our wounds, heal our diseases, refresh and impart perfect health to our souls. By means of prayer, which derives its power and efficacy from the Saviour's merits and promises, we can at every moment preserve divine grace and fortify ourselves for the combats and trials of this life.

But the Redemption requires also our own labor joined to that of our Redeemer. From the day on which Jesus shed His blood He continues to dispense its merits to us through the unceasing action of the Holy Ghost, who, ever present in our soul, urges us to shake off our sloth, to surmount our torpor and cowardice. "How long, yet," asks the

Sanctifier of souls, "will your heart be weighed down by vanity, sensuality and lying? Do you not see how God glorified His Son, who sacrificed Himself for your sake?"

O Jesus, Thy merits opened to us the treasures of grace and the Kingdom of glory. Deign to purify all my intentions and affections, and to impart to me the courage, first, to labor with Thee in healing the wounds of my soul by means of interior mortification, and secondly, to draw from Thee without ceasing, by means of prayer and the sacraments, all the assistance I need for my salvation.

7. THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

"Think diligently on Him that endured such opposition from sinners to Himself" (Heb. 12. 3).

I. AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS WE LEARN HOW TO PRAY. When we place ourselves in spirit on Calvary near the Cross, what do we see thereon? The Son of God dying for the love of us and, notwithstanding His anguish and excessive pains, continuing to pray for us. This is truly a touching sight, a sight fully capable of captivating our minds and hearts and of inducing us to pray with attention and fervor. Do not, indeed, the torments, privations and insults undergone by our Saviour excite our compassion, gratitude and repentance, all of which are so favorable to true devotion?

Our confidence also is greatly increased, when we

pray at the foot of the Cross. For, in the first place, He who died on that instrument of our salvation, sanctioned by His sufferings all the promises He made concerning prayer. How well adapted to encourage us to pray! Secondly, in prayer we implore our heavenly Father in union with the August Victim, who, by His tears and supplications, says St. Paul, draws the divine blessings upon us; and in union also with the Mother of sorrows and mercy, who dispenses to us the graces of the Redemption. Thence our petitions ascend to the throne of the Most High, in concert with the most sublime of sacrifices, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass which imparts fresh efficacy to our prayers. "When thou prayest at the foot of My Cross," said Jesus to St. Margaret of Cortona, "grace falls as abundantly on thy soul as My blood flowed from My wounds during My agony on Calvary. The oftener thou devotest thyself to contemplate Me in these torments, the more will My favors be multiplied in thee."

Wherefore let us often place ourselves at the feet of Jesus crucified, especially when preparing for confession. Let us then beseech our Redeemer to fill us with an intense sorrow for our sins at the thought that they have contributed to His sufferings and death. Let us act in like manner when we examine our conscience, or recite the rosary and other vocal prayers. The foot of the Cross can serve us as a kneeling-bench, and Calvary as an oratory in

which we shall easily learn to be recollected and pray with attention, confidence, fervor and perseverance.

O Jesus, O Mary, I unite myself to your sentiments on Good Friday. Impart to me a lively compassion for your sufferings, and with the sincere desire to suffer patiently with you. For this object I purpose often to watch and pray in spirit on Calvary, so as to obtain from you, in mental prayer, the courage to imitate you, according to the example you have given me in the midst of your sufferings.

2. AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS WE LEARN HOW TO PRACTISE EXCELLENT VIRTUES. St. Francis de Sales preferred the less prominent virtues born at the foot of the Cross, to those that are more striking and are placed, as he says, on the top of the Cross to be admired. Among the former are humility, meekness, hearty forbearance of our neighbor, condescension to the wishes of others, modesty and simplicity. "These virtues are the most odoriferous and the most bedewed with the Saviour's blood," he remarks, "for they mortify and sanctify the heart more efficaciously than instruments of penance and exterior mortifications which cause those who practise them to be considered as saints."

Wherefore, when we meditate and pray in spirit on Calvary, let us begin by humbling ourselves with Him who, being God, "emptied Himself," says St.

Paul, "taking the form of a servant . . . and humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross" (Phil. 2. 7, 8). Let us implore Him for the grace of practising this virtue, whenever the occasion offers, by meekly bearing contradictions, affronts, want of due regard, and dissembling the faults of our neighbor and yielding to him through a spirit of submission and condescension. These dispositions are, moreover, conformable to those of our Saviour on the cross, suffering in silence insults and ill-treatment, pardoning His executioners, and even excusing them and praying for them.

Jesus practised the modesty and simplicity mentioned by St. Francis de Sales, when dying as a criminal, although He was Innocence itself and infinitely holy, and offering Himself in sacrifice solely for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind lost by sin. He thereby teaches us to conceal our merit from men, that we may have God alone as our witness. He gives us the example of the upright intention which should accompany our actions, our words, our conduct and procure the honor and glory of God and our sanctification. Let us examine at the foot of the Cross, whether we imitate our crucified Saviour in His spirit of abasement; whether we are, like Him, willing to subject ourselves to our superiors, to be condescending towards our equals, and to treat kindly our inferiors, and even those who are opposed to us.

O my God, give me a love for the humble and hidden life, that may induce me to seek no other witness than Thee of all my actions. I am firmly resolved, first, to combat every desire of putting myself forward and of being esteemed; secondly, often to purify my intentions during the day, so that I may seek solely to glorify and please Thee in all things; and thirdly, to unite myself to Jesus and Mary on Calvary, so that with them I may practise the virtues that grow at the foot of the Cross, and especially humility, freedom from all selfish motives, quiet forbearance of my neighbor and uprightness in all my conduct.

8. THE PASSION OF JESUS

“Christ having suffered in the flesh, be you also armed with the same thought” (1 Pet. 4. 1).

I. THE PASSION, A MOTIVE FOR LOVING JESUS. According to St. Francis de Sales, Mount Calvary is the true school of sacred love. There faithful souls come to draw from the wounds of the Lion of Juda the honey of charity. And, in fact, what is more capable of inspiring us with the love of the Man-God? When I am told that He is infinitely perfect and infinitely lovable in Himself, I believe it, but my belief does not so speak to my heart, as does the sight of Jesus crucified, a sight which is a tangible proof of the Saviour's excessive love for

me, and of my obligation to love Him in return. How wonderful it is, indeed, that, almighty and infinite as He is, He has so abased Himself as to become man, and assume the appearance of a sinner, and to take upon Himself our sins and the punishment they deserve! And then should I, after all this, fail to love Him!

Had the meanest beggar done the thousandth part of all this for me, I would, were it in my power, receive him into my house and provide for all his wants and satisfy all his desires, as a grateful acknowledgment of his devotedness to me. And behold the very Son of God, the Lord of lords, comes down from His throne of bliss and glory to take my place on the gibbet of infamy, and I would fail to give Him the first place in my heart! And I would hesitate to consecrate to Him all my thoughts, all my desires, all my affections! Wherefore, as St. Paul truly declares, "if anyone love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema" (I Cor. 16. 22).

According to St. Francis de Sales, the death of our Divine Saviour will be, even in heaven, one of the most powerful motives to enkindle the heart of the elect with the tenderest love. How much more should not we on earth, in this vale of tears, think on the Saviour's sufferings, first, by often casting our eyes on the crucifix, and, secondly, by meditating on His grandeur and abasement, on the happiness He could have enjoyed here below, and on the

voluntary torments He deigned to undergo for our salvation. "Having joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebr. 12. 2).

O my divine Benefactor, what shall I give Thee in return for the boundless love which induced Thee to die in my stead, in order to impart to me the life of my soul? Being infinitely amiable in Thyself, on account of Thy infinite perfections, Thou hast willed to win my heart by Thy benefits also, and especially by manifesting so tender a love for me, as to render me unable to resist it. Grant me the grace to love Thee with a strong and constant love which will cause me to remain faithful to Thee amid all the sufferings and trials of this life.

2. RESOLUTIONS AT THE FEET OF THE CRUCIFIX.
"The love," says St. Francis de Sales, "which has not its origin in the Saviour's passion is frivolous and dangerous." And why? Because without the remembrance of Jesus crucified, we are easily deceived as to the essence of real virtue, and are led to place it in our favorite exercises of piety, rather than in humility, self-denial and death to all that is not God. Such an illusion would not be possible, if we were to take Jesus crucified as our Model. "He who earnestly takes Jesus crucified as his Model," says St. Alphonsus, "feels as if compelled to make great progress in the virtues that inflict death on our vicious and corrupt nature, and enable us to penetrate to the inmost depths of our self-love,

in order fully to extirpate our selfishness and make room for divine love."

The holy bishop of Geneva was, therefore, wont to advise all to wear a crucifix and often lovingly to kiss it and inflame themselves with the desire of imitating Jesus, and at times thus tenderly to address Him: "O Jesus, the Beloved of my soul, allow me to press Thee to my bosom as a bundle of myrrh; I promise Thee that my mouth, which is happy to kiss Thy sacred wounds, shall henceforth abstain from backbiting, complaints and all that displeases Thee; that my eyes which behold Thy blood and Thy tears flowing for my sins, shall no longer look upon the vanities of the world or on anything that may expose me to offend Thee; that my ears, which listen with so much consolation to the seven words Thou didst pronounce on the cross, shall no longer take pleasure in vain praises, idle conversations or words that wound charity; that my mind, after studying with delight the mystery of the cross, shall no longer give an opening to vain or evil thoughts and imaginations; and, in fine, that nothing shall enter or leave my heart, except with the permission of the holy cross, in the sacred sign of which I will glory."

O my Redeemer, enable me to approach the sacred tribunal of penance with greater humility and contrition, so that I may be perfectly purified therein by Thy precious blood. Help me to receive Thee with an ardent love in holy Communion and recall

to me then Thy sorrowful passion, so that it may inspire me with sincere gratitude and with a reassuring hope and a burning and sanctifying love. Amen.

EPILOGUE

Before concluding this book on the all-important subject of Prayer, the author wishes to recommend to the reader the frequent, and even daily, reading and study of a book, which is undoubtedly the most useful and eloquent of books; a book which every Christian, even the most illiterate can read and understand; a book which contains an inexhaustible fund of knowledge; a book which imparts fresh and solid knowledge every time it is read with attention; a book which is relished always more and more the oftener it is read; a book which is the consolation and delight of holy souls; a book which is capable of moving the heart of the most hardened sinner to repentance and to a holy life, of inspiring hope and courage to the despondent and despairing, of enabling the afflicted to bear cheerfully and even joyfully the heaviest trials, to experience even sweetness in the midst of even the bitterest sufferings; a book which those who practise its teachings, are able to overcome the most inveterate evil habits and even to attain the very summit of holiness! This book is the CRUCIFIX! It is to its study that saints like St. Augustine, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, St. Bernard, St. Alphonsus owed their great sanctity.

St. Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, boasted of possessing no other science than that of the Crucifix: "I judged not myself to know anything but Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (I Cor. 2. 2).

I. Many and great are the lessons we can learn when we study the Crucifix. Among them are the following:

1. The Crucifix tells us of the infinite love of the Son of God for us, sinners: "He loved me and delivered Himself for me" (Gal. 2. 20).

2. The Crucifix tells us also how ardently we should love Jesus Christ: "The (infinite) charity of Christ urgeth us" (to love Him in return) (II Cor. 5. 14); "If anyone love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema" (I Cor. 16. 22).

3. The Crucifix teaches us the inestimable value of our soul, and consequently our duty to save it at any cost: "You have been bought at a great price" (I Cor. 6. 20); "You were not redeemed with corruptible things as gold or silver . . . but with the (infinitely) precious blood of Christ" (I Pet. 1. 18, 19).

4. The Crucifix gives us a more powerful proof than even hell itself, of the malice of mortal sin, for God punishes the guilty sinner, a mere creature, in hell forever, but on the cross He punished His own divine Son, infinitely good and holy, whom He loves with infinite love, with the most disgraceful of deaths, because He took upon Himself to satisfy for the sins of mankind. Hence Jesus says to us:

“If this is done in the green wood (in the innocent), what shall be done in the dry?” (Luke 23. 31), that is, how fearfully shall the impenitent sinner be punished! “It is a horrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebr. 10. 31).

5. The Crucifix teaches us the love of our neighbor, which demands sacrifices on our part: Because the Son of God “hath laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (I John 3. 16).

6. The Crucifix teaches us the pardon of enemies. The very first words our divine Saviour uttered on the cross was a prayer for His enemies: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing” (Luke 23. 34).

7. The Crucifix teaches us humility, that most necessary fundamental virtue: “Christ Jesus, being God, emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant; He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, unto the death of the cross” (Phil. 2. 7, 8).

8. The Crucifix teaches us to bear with patience sufferings and humiliations: “Jesus, having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebr. 12. 2). He was, says the Prophet Isaias, “like a lamb led to the slaughter, uttering no complaint whatever.” “Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow in His footsteps . . . when He was reviled, He did not revile, when He suffered, He threatened not” (I Pet. 2. 21-23).

9. The Crucifix teaches us the value of sufferings patiently borne: "Think diligently upon Him that endured such opposition from sinners against Himself, that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds, for you have not yet resisted unto blood (and Jesus shed it all for us), striving against sin" (Hebr. 12. 3). "Yet so, if we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified (in heaven) with Him" (Rom. 8. 17).

10. The Crucifix teaches us also self-denial: Whilst hanging on the cross in an agony of pain, Jesus suffered terribly from a burning thirst, and cried out: "I thirst" (John 19. 28), and was given not even a drop of water, but only a sponge dipped in vinegar.

11. The Crucifix teaches us also the necessity and power of prayer, for Jesus prayed on the cross as He had done in the garden of olives; he prayed for sinners, and first of all for His very murderers and scoffers. And to inspire us with confidence, He promised paradise to the penitent thief who recommended himself to His remembrance.

12. The Crucifix also teaches us to love and place all our confidence in the Mother of Jesus, for His last will made on the Cross gave us to her as her children, and gave her to us as our Mother, Jesus said to Mary: "Behold thy Son," and to each of us: "Behold thy Mother" (John 19. 26, 27).

II. One day our divine Saviour, when preaching

in the temple, said to the Jews: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself" (John 12. 32). How improbable did these words then seem! Much more improbable did they appear a few days later, when Jesus was actually raised up on the cross between two thieves to die in infamy, accursed in Himself and in His memory! But, as is customary with God, He always chooses the most inadequate and totally unsuitable means, viewed from a natural standpoint, to achieve the most astounding and unexpected results, and therefore "Christ's infamy" thenceforth because the powerful instrument to "draw all things to Himself." A man's power does not survive him, for it is wholly extinguished in his tomb. But with Jesus Christ His power becomes manifest only in death. Whilst hanging on the instrument of death and infamy, He drew to Himself the penitent thief and the soldiers on guard. After His resurrection and ascension He began to draw all men to Himself, beginning with the poor and the lowly and the illiterate, and continuing later on with the learned, the great and the powerful, until pagan idolatry was extirpated and the world believed in Him. When the barbarians had destroyed the Roman power and its civilisation, He enabled His Church to humanize and christianize the barbarians and to impart to them a more noble civilisation, the Christian civilisation, the fruits and benefits of

which the world even now still enjoys. Ever since Jesus was lifted up on the cross He has drawn to Himself

1. First, MAN'S THOUGHT. All who embrace the faith taught by Him, submit their reason to the infallible guidance of His Church and, on her authority, firmly believe mysteries incomprehensible to reason. No one else has ever been able thus to draw, subjugate and govern man's thought.

2. Secondly, Jesus lifted up on the cross, that is Jesus crucified, has drawn to Himself MAN'S WILL. For nineteen centuries hundreds of millions of free-men, cherishing liberty above every other natural possession, have had no other will than that of Jesus Christ, and have, therefore, cheerfully submitted their will to His laws, commands and restraints. With Him they become meek and humble of heart, practise self-denial, joyfully take up His yoke, crucify their flesh and its lusts, chastise and subdue their bodies, lest they rebel against the will of Jesus Christ. Many, in order to be wholly His, to devote themselves entirely to His service, heroically forsake all that is dear to them, parents, relatives, possessions, bright prospects and their fatherland, and embrace a life of poverty, chastity, obedience and labor and hardships among the poor, the heathen, the sick, and even among the very outcasts of society, for the love of Him who, from His cross, draws to Himself their hearts, their chaste love and unreserved devotedness. With St. Paul these heroic souls can

exclaim: "With Christ I am nailed to the cross, and I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2. 19, 20).

3. Thirdly, Jesus Christ crucified has drawn to Himself MAN'S HEART, for He has conquered man's love. Ever since His ascension to heaven numberless pilgrims in all ages visit and venerate in the Holy Land every spot hallowed by His presence, especially His sepulchre. The Crusades in the Middle Ages fulfilled this prophecy of Isaias (II. 10): "His sepulchre shall be glorious." Among the many great men the world has produced, not one has gained the love of mankind. But Jesus Christ "lifted up," crucified, has won the hearts of the best portion of mankind. The best, the purest, the most virtuous of men have loved and love Jesus Christ crucified with the tenderest and most devoted love, more than their parents, or their children, more than their dearest friends and companions, more than their own selves, and they have ever been ready to sacrifice, for His sake, all their goods and their very life, as is evident from history itself. And even more, for they considered it the greatest honor and happiness to be accounted worthy of suffering and dying for the love of Jesus crucified! The very sight of the image, picture or representation of "Jesus lifted up on the cross," THE CRUCIFIX, excites their tenderest love, for with how great ardor, fervor and devoted love do they not impress kisses on His sacred wounds! In fact, there is no

love comparable in intensity, constancy, heroism, and fruitful effects to the love of Jesus crucified "in the hearts He has drawn to Himself." That love draws sweet tears of contrition and amendment from the sinner, imparts peace, consolation and cheerfulness to the suffering, to the sorely tried, and superhuman strength and constancy to the martyrs, to the penitents. The martyrs consider it an honor, a happiness surpassing all earthly honors and enjoyments, to suffer the most exquisite torments, the most cruel death for the love of Jesus crucified. Both the innocent and the penitent experience a heavenly sweetness in meditating, even for hours at a time, on the love of Jesus, who for their sake, endured so many insults and pains and was "lifted up" and died so ignominious a death.

And where is the dying Catholic who does not most willingly endure his great pains and accept his approaching death calmly and cheerfully in union with the sufferings and death of Jesus crucified, and depart this life with love and confidence, whilst pressing to his lips the image of the crucified Saviour? The calm and consoling deaths of Catholics, sweetened by the love of Jesus crucified, are the admiration of non-Catholics, who know not how to account for them. They are, however, a clear proof of the fulfilment of our divine Saviour's prophecy: "And I, when I shall be lifted up, will draw all things to Myself."

4. Finally, Jesus Christ crucified has drawn to

HIMSELF MAN'S BODY. Man has a natural aversion to bodily sufferings and mortifications. And, nevertheless, the love of "Jesus lifted up," after "drawing men's hearts to Himself," induces them to become enemies and tormentors of their flesh by fasting, abstinence, coarse food, numerous austerities and penances, and even by making and keeping faithfully the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. For the love of Jesus crucified multitudes give up what is dearest to them; and all renounce manifold comforts and pleasures of life, and devote themselves to works of charity and zeal with self-sacrificing love. The sight of this made so deep an impression on the great Napoleon, that he did not hesitate to say: "Unlike human conquerors, Jesus Christ conquers, not for a time or merely a few nations, but the whole human race, and He will conquer it to the end of time. Jesus conquers in every one that believes in Him, that which is most difficult to subjugate, his heart, his love! For His sake millions have joyfully undergone martyrdom, and still undergo the most painful hardships. He will live forever in millions of hearts." And this, in the hearts of the best, the purest, the noblest and the most enlightened of mankind!

Let us daily raise our eyes to Jesus "lifted up" on the cross out of love for us, and allow Him to draw to Himself our minds by practically adopting, through serious reflection and prayer, His teaching concerning the vanity of earthly goods, honors and

pleasures; our wills, our hearts, our love, our bodies by cheerfully denying ourselves, for His sake, all that is displeasing to Him, and by willingly making every sacrifice, however great, long and painful, that may be necessary to serve Him faithfully, to return to Him love for love, and thereby secure for our souls the benefits of the Redemption both in this life and in the next. Amen.

THE END

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Prayer: Its Necessity, Its Power,
Its Conditions.

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